

**COULTHARD: '98 WORLD CHAMPION?
PLUS: STRAIGHT TALKING FROM EDDIE IRVINE**



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AUTOSPORT

**GRAND PRIX RACING
UNDER ATTACK ON
ALL FRONTS**

SCHUMACHER

THE VERDICT

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FORMULA 1 IN THE DOCK

'FIXING' CLAIM



Williams,
McLaren
counter race
rigging
accusation

TOBACCO STORM



Uproar as
government
backs down
over Grand
Prix ad ban

SENNA TRIAL



Team boss
set for
acquittal,
but trial
continues

13 NOVEMBER 1997

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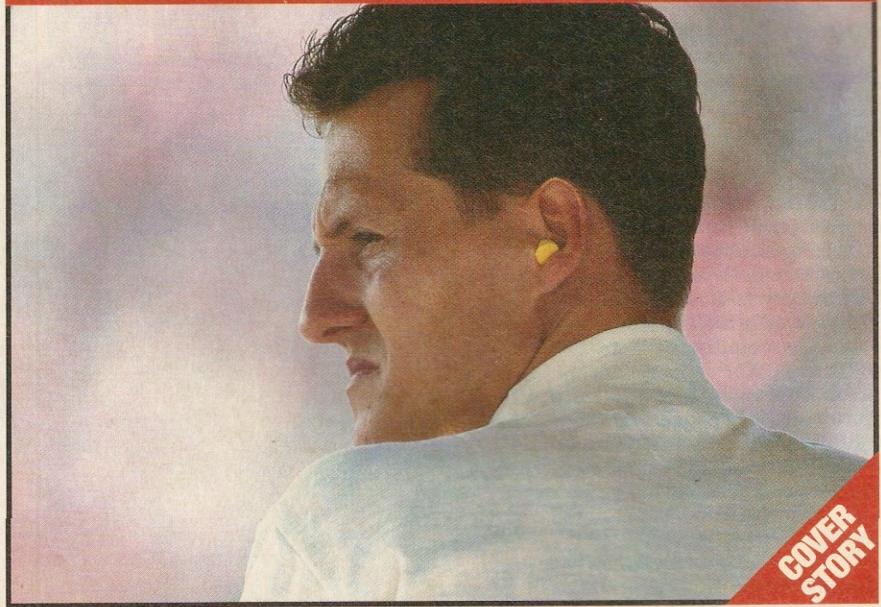
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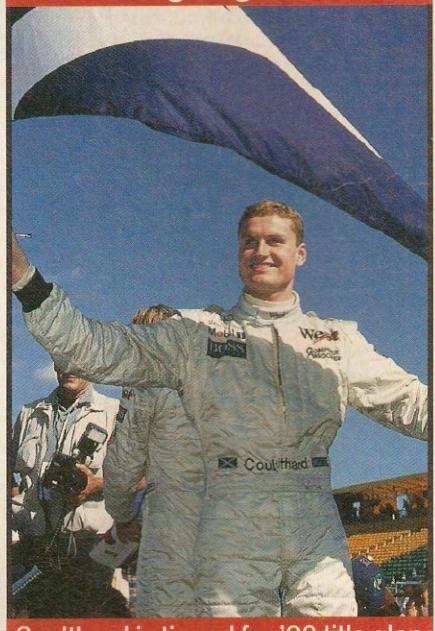
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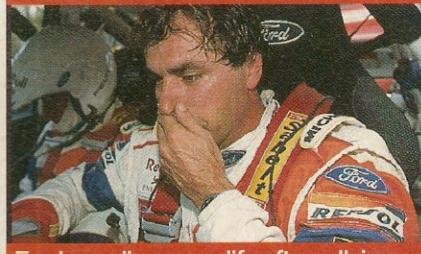


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MEMBER OF
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CIRCULATIONS



Michael Schumacher is free to race from the start of next year after escaping lightly at this week's FIA hearing. By Tim Collings

Michael Schumacher has escaped virtually unpunished for his assault on title rival Jacques Villeneuve at last month's European Grand Prix at Jerez. The German double World Champion, who drove his Ferrari into Villeneuve's Williams on the 48th lap of the title showdown, has lost only his second place in the 1997 drivers' World Championship.

A room packed with experienced reporters at the headquarters of the British motorsport federation, the RAC MSA, was left stunned by the outcome of Schumacher's confrontation with the World Motor Sports Council of the FIA, the sport's governing body, as well as FIA president Max Mosley's explanation that any other sanction would not have had a deterrent effect.

Schumacher was stripped of his second place in the championship but will not receive any other punishment. The FIA rejected the possibility of banning or fining him, or taking away points for 1998, because, Mosley said, it wanted to have a strict deterrent for the future.

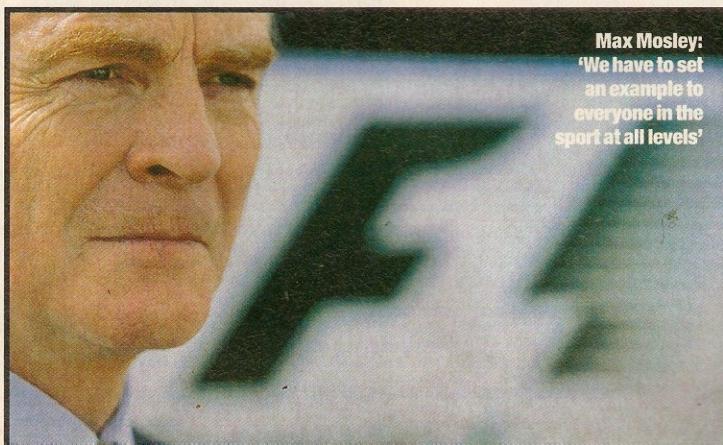
The verdict, announced by Mosley, was widely interpreted as a non-punishment.

Schumacher was handed an additional 'sanction' of being asked to do seven days' public relations work on behalf of the European Commission's road safety campaign next year, but this was seen as having little or no connection with the case, particularly as the driver said he would have agreed to carry out these duties anyway.

Mosley said the council had given deep consideration to Schumacher's ill-judged lunge before concluding that it was not pre-meditated. He said they concluded that it was a deliberate, but instinctive action - a mistake, which Schumacher admitted and regretted.

He explained that the council had rejected the idea of banning Schumacher from all or part of the 1998 season because it would not have been a deterrent for a driver faced by the same circumstances in the future. 'If any driver was asked if

SCHUMACHER



Max Mosley:
‘We have to set
an example to
everyone in the
sport at all levels’

ALISON

he would trade all of next season's races for the championship this season, he would do it,' he said.

Mosley said he did not know if Schumacher would suffer financially as a result of losing second place in the championship, but Ferrari team chief Jean Todt, who accompanied Schumacher and his manager Willi Weber to the hearing, confirmed that the German would not be fined or lose any money.

Asked if it was no more than a slap on the wrist, Mosley said: 'Oh, yes, it is much more than that. If he was banned from next year then it

would not affect what he had done in '97. That would be no deterrent. We needed to set an example to everyone in the sport at all levels.'

Mosley added that there was no better role model than a reformed sinner for the public relations safety work Schumacher will undertake next year. He added Schumacher's previous incidents - such as Adelaide '94 - had not been taken into consideration.

Schumacher said: 'It's something I have to accept. The last couple of weeks have been tough for me because I lost the championship,



ESCAPES BAN

The major punishment for Schumacher, seen here arriving at the FIA disciplinary hearing with Ferrari boss Jean Todt, is the loss of second place in this year's championship

which I was confident I would win, and I found that difficult to accept. It wasn't easy for me to live with that. For two or three days, I also struggled with my sleeping because of the pressure I felt from what I had done. But I have to learn from this now.

'It was an instinctive action and it was important they decided it was not deliberate. If it was (deliberate), I would have done things differently to what I did because I could have let him go and caught him and passed him back on the inside.'

Schumacher said he was sorry to have caused so much pain to

If Schumacher was banned from next year it would not affect what he had done in '97

MAX MOSLEY

Reaction

Top F1 names on the outcome of the Schumacher court case

DAMON HILL, 1996 World Champion

'It's instinctive to try to avoid an accident, and far more natural. It's not the kind of heavy sanction we were expecting or were promised by Max Mosley at the drivers' briefing (at Jerez).'

JACKIE STEWART, three-time World Champion and team boss

'My concern is that this was an opportunity to drive home to every driver, from Formula 1 to Formula Ford, that if you behave in a manner unbecoming to the sport, you won't get away with it.'

DAVID RICHARDS, Benetton chief executive

'It's a creative compromise and not one that I envisaged. You have to remember that the FIA had all the facts in front of it and had to be careful not to create a scale of penalties so punitive that they were unworkable. If your penalty for a first offence is hanging, then there's not a lot of scope left. The appeal of this judgement is that we do at least start next season with a clean sheet of paper.'

KEN TYRRELL, Tyrrell team boss

'Schumacher has not been punished at all. Losing second place in the championship is no punishment. In my opinion he should have been allowed to start the season but been handed a points penalty.'

MURRAY WALKER, ITV commentator

'I like to think what happened at Jerez was an involuntary reaction to someone coming down the inside of him. That being the case, I don't take as grave a view as some people do. I'm mindful of the fact that Alain Prost and Ayrton Senna, two of the all-time greats, each did something similar and got away with it. Michael is a decent and honest bloke, and although he's got away with it, I don't think he'll do this sort of thing again.'

DEREK WARWICK, former Grand Prix driver and safety campaigner

'The one thing the FIA has to be is consistent. You have to ask if it had been (Shinji) Nakano or (Tarso) Marques, would it have been dealt with in the same way?'

the fans of Ferrari and F1.

Todt said his driver had suffered enough in the past few weeks not to be made to suffer any further through a financial penalty. 'His human sensibility has been affected enough in the last days,' he said.

Asked how the FIA might have reacted if Schumacher's actions were regarded as deliberate, Mosley said: 'If we thought it was premeditated, then we would have had to take a very serious view. In this particular instance, both Villeneuve and Schumacher were under enormous pressure. They

had one point between them, they had people shouting in their ear: "He's just one second behind you", and the pressure, in those circumstances, is enormous.

'Schumacher did the wrong thing, obviously, but all the evidence points to him reacting instinctively. Had he thought about it, for one second, he would have allowed Villeneuve through.'

'Schumacher is a human being and every now and then will make a mistake. He admitted he did it deliberately, but instinctively, and it was the wrong thing to do.'

Acquit team boss, says prosecutor

Manslaughter charges against team boss Frank Williams resulting from the death of Ayrton Senna at the 1994 San Marino Grand Prix should be dropped, the prosecutor in the case has requested.

In a sensational twist to the long-running court drama last Friday, prosecutor Maurizio Passarini requested that Williams, who recently took the stand at the Imola court, should be acquitted.

Passarini, who alleges that Senna was killed after a badly modified steering column caused him to crash, said that because Williams had no

knowledge of changes to the steering mechanism requested by the three-time World Champion, he had 'committed no offence'. The prosecution accepted Williams's evidence that he was not in day-to-day control of technical matters within the team and therefore had no 'judicial power' to stop the modifications being carried out.

But Passarini is pushing ahead with the case against Williams technical director Patrick Head and the designer of Senna's Williams-Renault FW16, Adrian Newey, who has subsequently left the team to



Williams: cleared?

join McLaren.

Williams was not available for comment, but a spokeswoman for his team said: 'At the moment it (an acquittal) is only a request from the prosecution; the judge could throw it out.'

'Even if the charges against Frank were dropped, we have to consider the charges against Patrick and, indeed, Adrian.'

In his summing up for the prosecution, Passarini said that Head and Newey, who have both exercised their right of silence over the case, were negligent because they 'did not check how the plan (to modify the steering) was executed'.

The court reconvenes on November 26, when the defence is due to sum up, but a verdict is not expected until mid-December.

Newey and Head in theory could face a seven-year prison sentence if convicted of manslaughter, although a one-year suspended sentence has been touted as more likely. And even if they were found guilty, all five defendants would have the immediate right of appeal, which could delay any final decision for up to two years.

F1 boss could face Imola charges

Formula 1 promotions boss Bernie Ecclestone and three employees of one of his companies could face perjury charges over their conduct in the trial arising from the death of Ayrton Senna.

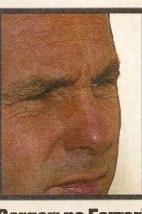
Prosecutor Maurizio Passarini announced on Friday that he was opening an investigation into the evidence given by three employees of FOCA TV - producer Eddie Baker, producer Alan Wolard and technician Andrew James. Although Ecclestone has not given evidence at the Imola court, the prosecutor said he would be investigated 'for other possible charges, such as aiding and abetting'.

Berger scotches sub stories

Gerhard Berger, who stepped down from Formula 1 last month, has dismissed speculation that he could have stood in for Michael Schumacher at Ferrari had the German been banned from the opening Grands Prix of 1998.

Speaking from Monaco last week, before the Ferrari driver's hearing, 38-year-old Berger said: 'If Michael had been suspended and I got a call from (Ferrari boss) Luca di Montezemolo, I would turn it away.'

Speculation that Berger, who left the door open for an F1 return on



Berger: no Ferrari

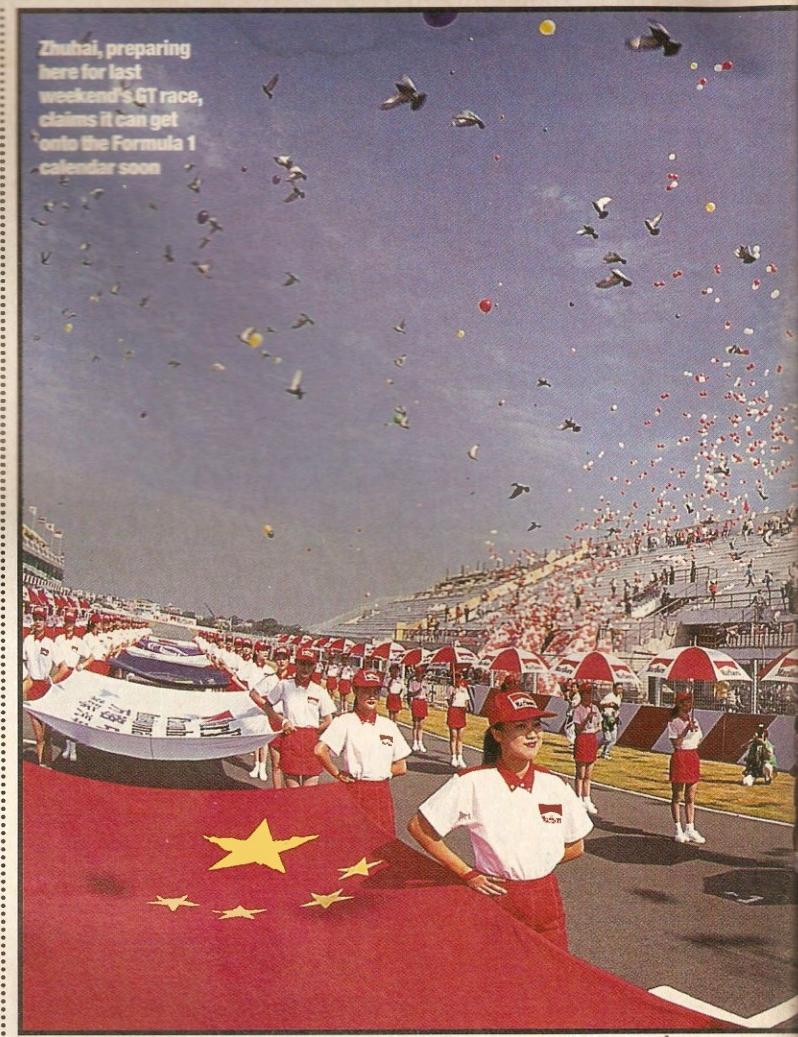
announcing his retirement, would be the most likely stand-in at Ferrari started straight after the possibility

arose of Schumacher being banned for his part in the collision with title rival Jacques Villeneuve at the European Grand Prix.

Although the Austrian said that since he stepped out of the car in Jerez he was 'the happiest man in the world', Berger again hinted he was not finished with racing.

'I cannot say what will be going on in my mind next February or March,' he said.

Zhuhai, preparing here for last weekend's GT race, claims it can get onto the Formula 1 calendar soon



Trulli gets full season at Prost

Italian Jarno Trulli, who contested seven Grands Prix for Prost in his rookie Formula 1 season, will drive with the French team next year, it was confirmed last week.

Twenty-three-year-old Trulli, who joined the team when Frenchman Olivier Panis was broke his legs in the Canadian Grand Prix, has signed a two-year contract to drive Prost's Peugeot-powered cars.

Team boss Alain Prost, the three-time World Champion, said: 'Although Jarno joined us in rather difficult circumstances, I was immediately

impressed by the ease with which he adapted to his new team, by his desire to learn, by his motivation and by the quality of his work.'

'He showed tremendous maturity when he led the Austrian Grand Prix, ahead of Jacques Villeneuve, for half the race.'

Trulli, who scored three points for Prost after his switch from Minardi, said: 'The atmosphere in the team is great and I am thrilled at the prospect of continuing my career with Prost. There is no doubt that the team has a great future ahead of it.'



Trulli: Prost's man



THE FERRARI F310B ran for probably the last time at Enna-Pergusa last weekend when Michael Schumacher (right) and Eddie Irvine took to the lakeside circuit before some 100,000 fans. The event also brought Ferrari's 50th anniversary celebrations to a close



Lawrence/Sutton Images

Zhuhai targets GP by year 2000

China's only permanent race track is still in with a chance of hosting a Grand Prix before 2000, according to the boss of the Zhuhai circuit.

Joe Lim made the claim after again meeting F1 promotions boss Bernie Ecclestone in the run up to last weekend's invitation GT race on the 2.68-mile track, which is near the Portuguese enclave of Macau.

'Bernie is interested in bringing F1 to China,' said Lim. 'We want the race here as soon as possible and we have the support of the government, which is helping us to bring this sport to Zhuhai.'

Zhuhai had appeared to be in line to become the first of the so-called Tiger Economies in the Far East to host a Grand Prix. But although the circuit was christened with a round of the FIA-sanctioned Global Endurance GT Series in '96, any hope of an immediate inclusion on the F1 calendar appeared to have been scuppered for financial reasons.

But Lim points out that unlike rival bids for races in South Korea and Malaysia, China already has an F1-standard facility.

Lim says he wants Zhuhai to host a round of the FIA GT Championship next year, possibly as a precursor to a Grand Prix in 1999.

Zhuhai GT report
Page 86

Schuey confident of good start to season

Michael Schumacher last week declared that he will have a competitive car right from the start of the season, for the first time since joining Ferrari.

Speaking during celebrations of Ferrari's 50th anniversary, Schumacher, who is going into his third year with the Italian team, said: 'I believe the new car will be competitive from the beginning to help us achieve what we all want.'

The announcement marks a departure for Schumacher, who has previously talked down his chances of winning the world title in the run-up to the season.

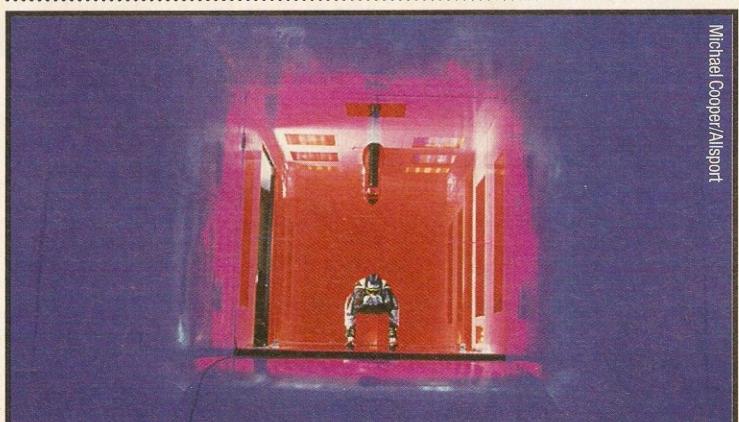
Helsinki plans to host F1 race

The city of Helsinki could echo to the sound of Formula 1 cars in 2000, if ambitious plans by the organisers of the Helsinki Thunder street race come to fruition.

Robert Lappalainen and his wife Marja-Leena, who have brought the International Touring Car and then the FIA GT championships to their harbour-side circuit over the past three seasons, have made a proposal for a Finnish Grand Prix to F1 promotions boss Bernie Ecclestone.

Marja-Leena, Helsinki Thunder managing director, said: 'We have talked about a Grand Prix with Bernie every once in a while.'

'F1 is our big dream, but we know



Michael Cooper/Allsport

JORDAN'S NEW WIND TUNNEL was visited by the British Alpine Ski team as it continued its preparations for next year's Winter Olympics in Japan. Downhill racer Graham Bell said the session revealed valuable information about the all-important tuck positions

we have a lot of problems to solve.'

Those problems include the bumpy surface, which came in for criticism from drivers in the GT race and the supporting round of the Formula 3000 International Championship, as well as a complete lack of pits.

But Lappalainen said that plans were afoot to address both problems. 'We want to have a permanent control tower and use semi-permanent pits which are erected specially for the race,' she said. 'We are also working with the city to improve the streets and to extend the circuit to nearly 2.5 miles (from just under two miles).'

Montoya lined up for Williams testing seat

Colombian Juan Pablo Montoya, runner-up in this year's Formula 3000 International series, could be the next Williams test driver.

Although Williams refused to comment on the stories that the 22-year-old could replace Frenchman Jean-Christophe Boullion, Montoya admitted he had been in contact with the team.

'There's not a lot I can say,' he explained. 'I talked with them earlier in the year, but nothing has been decided yet.'

'I would like to continue to race, maybe in F3000 again, and combine it with some F1 testing.'

News In Brief

FORMULA 1

The long-running dispute over Formula 1's constitution, the Concorde Agreement, could be settled by the offer of share equity for the teams, including dissidents Williams, McLaren and Tyrrell, on the flotation of F1. Under the plan, the teams could collectively receive 10% of nearly £2 billion equity.

Ian Cocks, the wealthy enthusiast

who was the mastermind behind the Australian Grand Prix from 1985-'95, was killed last weekend when his Porsche 911 crashed in the inaugural Classic Adelaide rally. Fifty-nine-year-old Cocks, who owned a successful concrete producing business, died instantly when the car crashed, overturned and was engulfed in flames from what is believed to have been an oil fire. Cocks's 19-year-old daughter Chantal, his co-driver, was pulled free by spectators.

Formula 1 World Travel, which masterminds the Grand Prix circus travel arrangements, is said to be already organising for the much-rumoured hot-weather test at Kyalami in February.

Sauber's C17 will be ready by the end of January. The Swiss team will resume testing a narrow-track version of the C16 once the F1 testing ban ends on December 1.

New Prost technical director Bernard Dudot, who held the same position at Renault Sport from 1980 until this year, has started work at the French team's Magny-Cours base.

Briton Jamie Davies, McLaren/AUTOSPORT BRDC Young Driver in 1994, tested a 1997 McLaren-Mercedes MP4-12 at Silverstone on Tuesday in preparation for his participation in this weekend's annual Formula 1 versus Indycar pitstop competition at Mercedes's 'Stars & Cars' Day. He also sampled two Honda-powered McLarens from the '80s.

TOURING CARS

Honda Motor Europe boss

Trevor Elliott reports that the make's German Super Touring Championship team and drivers should be confirmed at the end of this week. Five drivers have been tested – among them are believed to be Formula 3000 star and Le Mans winner Tom Kristensen, Japanese GT Champion Michael Krumm and BMW GT and Super Touring ace Peter Kox.

Formula 3 racer Paula Cook

believed to be somewhere in the reckoning for a Peugeot seat in next season's British Touring Car Championship. Her father Derek Cook's DC Cool Motorsport outfit has also been linked with a project to run a two-car team in the independents' division.

Brazilian leads way in Ford's shoot-out

Brazilian touring car wannabe Flavio Figueiredo has moved into pole position to pick up one of the remaining factory seats in next year's British Touring Car Championship, following a Ford-organised five-man shoot-out last week at Croft.

Figueiredo, a leading contender in this year's BTCC-supporting Vauxhall Vectra Challenge, lapped a West Surrey Racing-run Mondeo in 1m23.9s in a one-hour session, 0.9s slower than long-time Ford man Paul Radisich circulated the North Yorkshire circuit in the June races.

Radisich has given himself until tomorrow (Friday) to decide whether he will stay at Ford, or make a switch to Peugeot.

The 35-year-old New Zealander said: 'By the end of this week I will have made my mind up.'

If Radisich does jump ship to drive for Peugeot, where he settled in well during a one-off appearance in the Bathurst 1000 in Australia, it would leave Figueiredo as the favourite to partner veteran Will Hoy.

And if Radisich remains at Ford, Figueiredo could be chosen by Peugeot. He tested a 406 at



Radisich: decision

Pembrey in July, and is rated by Motor Sport Developments, the organisation which constructs and runs the Peugeots and builds the Vectra Challenge cars.

But when asked of the likely replacement for the outgoing Patrick Watts, Peugeot Sport boss Mick Linford could only say: 'I wish I knew, although I have approached a person.' This is believed to be Radisich.

In the Ford test, Figueiredo outpaced Volvo man Kelvin Burt - a former works Mondeo driver - by 0.1s. Others who took part were Vectra champion Julian Westwood, long-time touring car hopeful Michael Vergers and New Zealand ace Craig Baird, the man robbed of victory in the Bathurst 1000 by a rules blunder on the part of his BMW Motorsport Australia team.

Burt is still on the list as a potential candidate at the TWR-run Volvo team, but first the Swedish car giant must confirm whether it will stay in the BTCC, as expected, or switch to the German Super Touring Championship.

TWR could also run a Ford-style shoot-out: 'That's still to be decided,' said a team spokesman.

Goodyear gears up with new team

Canadian Indycar veteran Scott Goodyear is part of a major new team which will see him mount a strong challenge for the next two Indy Racing League titles.

Thirty-seven-year-old Goodyear, runner-up in the 1992 and '97 Indianapolis 500s, will drive for Panther Racing in an Oldsmobile Aurora-powered G-Force chassis.

The Indianapolis-based Panther outfit has been set up by various local business, entertainment and sports stars and long-time Indycar crew chief John Barnes.

And it has attracted backing from oil company Pennzoil, one of Indycar racing's most famous

sponsors which last triumphed at the Indy 500 in 1988 with Rick Mears.

Barnes said: 'We expect to win races, nothing less. We will give Scott the best car we can. If we live up to our part of the bargain, and Scott drives like we know that he can, then I certainly believe we will be a contender at Indianapolis as well as being the team to beat for the championship.'

Goodyear, already the winner of two 500-mile Indycar races - at Michigan in 1992 and '94 - said: 'It's very exciting to be part of the team and addressing some unfinished business at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.'

Cheever continues after split

Formula 1-turned-Indycar star Eddie Cheever's race team has split into two operations with the departure of some of its key principals and sponsor.

The new ISM Racing team, set up by former Team Cheever partners Gary Sallee and Bob Hancher, will run former motocrosser and now Indycar League rising star Jeff Ward in next season's IRL at the wheel of a G-Force chassis.

Ward's car will run alongside the NASCAR Winston Cup Pontiac of Todd Bodine within the ISM stable, and will take to the track for the first time in the IRL open test at the Disney World oval next month.

Cheever, meanwhile, has retained team manager Dick Caron in an attempt to improve on his third place in the just-finished IRL campaign.

'Our team's focus will be on improving our reliability, the one area that stopped us from winning the championship in 1997,' said the former Ligier, Renault and Arrows Grand Prix driver. 'We will make the changes necessary to continue our upward growth that will give us the opportunity to win.'

Cheever is considering a change from G-Force chassis, but would not be drawn on whether he favoured the Dallara or Riley & Scott.



Morris gets consolation title

Australian BMW ace Paul Morris, the man denied victory in the Bathurst 1000 by a rules blunder on the part of his team, took his second Australian Super Touring Championship title in three years on Sunday.

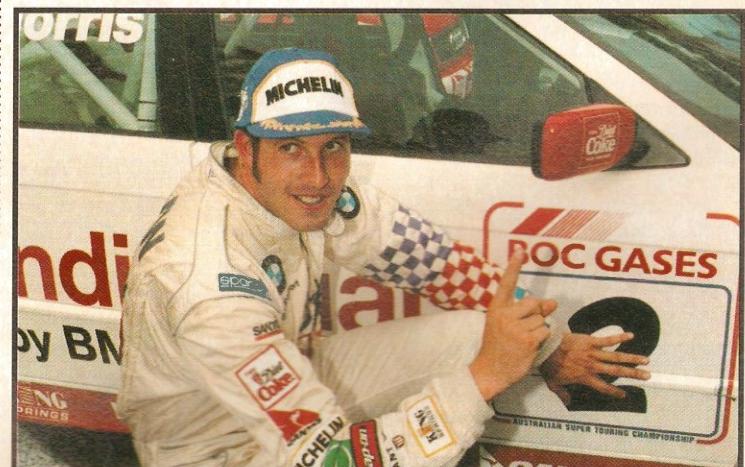
And now the 29-year-old Queenslander, whose only rival for the title was his team mate Geoff Brabham - the man ultimately awarded the Bathurst laurels - has staked his claim to a drive in Europe or North America.

Morris, who tried to get into the defunct North American Touring Car Championship in 1996, said he hopes to leave Australia 'if BMW can

put together a programme for me'.

But his success may have come at the wrong time. BMW has pulled out of the FIA GT and German Super Touring Championships, so there is little chance of any of the remaining projects requiring drivers from outside the Munich firm's 1997 driver line-up.

Morris took the title at twisty Amaroo Park near Sydney by winning one of the races. That came against expectations, as the BMW 320is took on an extra 30kg 'success penalty' mid-season, and were tipped to struggle on a circuit which normally favours the four-wheel-drive Audis.



Newly crowned Australian champion Paul Morris signals that he is now number one



AUSTRALIAN SUPER TOURING
privateer Mike Fitzgerald was lucky to escape serious injury when his Peugeot 405 was engulfed in flame at Amaroo Park on Sunday. Fitzgerald had collided with the Audi A4 of Brad Jones, which was lapping him. His car hit a bank and then caught fire as it spun through the air. Fitzgerald sustained cuts and bruises, but no broken bones

Rain denies Larini first taste of new Alfa 156

Ferrari Formula 1 test driver Nicola Larini was unable to get his much-anticipated first run in the new Alfa Romeo 156 Super Tourer at Mugello last week because of bad weather.

Instead, the two-day test saw Fabrizio Giovanardi, Larini's team mate in the Alfa squad in next season's Italian Touring Car Championship, and Fiat Corse test driver Giorgio Francia complete only a few laps in the wet.

Fiat Corse's Claudio Chierici said that further runs for the 156, which set extremely quick times in its maiden test two weeks ago, could take place next week.

Tyre warmers agreed for BTCC

British Touring Car Championship boss Alan Gow has staved off driver disquiet over possible safety problems in the new-for-1998 one-lap qualifying shoot-outs and pitstop races by allowing teams to use tyre warmers.

Drivers were worried that, because the front-wheel-drive cars that will be virtually universal next season can take a long time to heat up their rear tyres, it could lead to accidents on cold rubber.

Vauxhall veteran John Cleland said: 'The drivers should be asked about anything relating to their own safety. The cost of tyre warmers is a round of drinks in the

Signor/Sutton Images



The first spyshot of Alfa's brand new 156 Super Tourer taken during testing at Mugello

overall scheme of things.'

But Gow has pre-empted any controversy by allowing 'normal commercially available tyre blankets under controlled circumstances.'

That means that the blankets will be able to cover the tyres in the pits, but not while cars are sitting on the grid - that is taken care of by the usual warm-up laps.

Gow said: 'The teams wanted to continue to disallow tyre warmers on the grounds of cost, but we're not going to compromise safety.'

BTCC and the new rules
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Mansell sought for Kiwi series

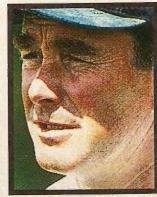
Nigel Mansell is the object of plans by the organisers of the New Zealand Touring Car Championship which would see the former Formula 1 World Champion contest three rounds of the series in January.

Motorace New Zealand is said by Kiwi sources to have come up with an offer which would be satisfactory for the 44-year-old to race a Ford Telstar, the country's Mondeo equivalent, in the series for Group N-type cars.

Ironically, the Telstar in question was previously raced by British Touring Car Championship ace Paul Radisich, Mansell's Mondeo team mate when he raced in the TOCA Shoot-out touring car race at Donington Park in 1993.

Mansell's associate Sheridan Thynne claimed not to have any knowledge of any approach, but reiterated: 'He hasn't retired yet. I think Nigel has made people aware that if the right opportunity to race a car came along he'd take it.'

Thynne added that talks between Mansell and Indycar team Patrick Racing, for which he is rumoured to be driving in selected races next year, are also still at a very informal stage. Mansell himself is on holiday.



Mansell: still keen

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Gardner forced to sell Aussie series team

Former World Motorcycle Champion Wayne Gardner has put his Australian Touring Car Championship team up for sale.

Gardner, who has raced a Holden Commodore for four seasons and was denied victory in this year's Primus 1000 Classic at Bathurst by a blown engine, says he cannot raise the £500,000 shortfall caused by the withdrawal of his sponsor Coca-Cola.

Now Gardner plans to continue with Toyota in the All-Japan GT Championship, as well as looking towards Europe. He visited the British and German touring car series this year in a 'summer tour'.

BMW joins junior team club

BMW is to join the McLaren and Prost Formula 1 organisations in running junior teams in the Formula 3000 International Championship.

The plan is the project of German junior team guru Jochen Neerpasch, who masterminded the BMW young driver squad of the late 1970s as well as the Mercedes junior effort in the early '90s, which produced Michael Schumacher, Heinz-Harald Frentzen and Karl Wendlinger.

Timo Scheider, Alexander Muller and Dominik Schwager - winners of nine races between them in this year's German Formula 3 Championship - will make the step

up together. They teamed up this year in another Neerpasch project: the Benetton-backed KMS F3 team.

Although Neerpasch has been criticised for moving his drivers into a senior formula too soon, particularly by the KMS camp, Scheider claims that the drivers are ready to make the step.

'I don't think the step is too big for any of us,' he said. 'You might say the opportunity has come a little bit early, but we would be stupid not to accept it at this stage. Who knows,



Scheider: step up

we might even step up into F1 with BMW in a few years.'

It is already predicted that the three will play a part in F1 engine development tests.

Neerpasch said: 'If the chance if there you should take it. Their main objective is gaining experience.'

Neerpasch is talking to existing British and French teams to run the attack, but could instead link up with renowned touring car

team Bigazzi, which is expected to have only a limited BMW sportscar programme next year (see below).

Bigazzi to run Williams at Le Mans

The crack Bigazzi touring car team looks certain to mastermind BMW's attack on next year's Le Mans 24 Hours with the new Williams-built sports racing cars - after undergoing a name change.

The Siena-based team is '75% sure' of running the new V12-engined contender under construction at Williams, said a spokeswoman for BMW in the wake of news that Schnitzer - which ran the Munich marque's 1996 Le Mans assault - will return to touring cars in Germany.

'There are many arguments in favour of Bigazzi doing Le Mans,'

she said, 'but at the moment the only thing decided is that there will be a factory team at the 24 Hours.'

BMW also confirmed that it is considering taking its sports racer to the US as early as next season. Although, at six litres, the new V12 has too large a capacity for the World Sports Car category, BMW is developing a four-litre V8 in parallel so that the car is eligible to race against the likes of Ferrari's 333SP and the Riley & Scott MkIII.

JJ Lehto, who led BMW's FIA GT Championship campaign in a Schnitzer McLaren this year, will almost certainly head the German

manufacturer's sportscar attack in Europe and the US, while Briton Steve Soper looks likely for Le Mans.

Bigazzi will, however, adopt the name of its owner, Gabriele Rafanelli, probably running under the banner of Team Rafanelli.

Although Rafanelli, a wealthy industrialist, was in Macau for his team's assault on the Guia Super Touring event this weekend and unavailable for comment, the BMW spokeswoman said: 'Gabriele and (team manager) Aldo Bigazzi didn't work so well together this year as in the past, so they have decided it is the right time to part.'

McLaren F3000 team gets miles

German Formula 3 Champion Nick Heidfeld completed four days of testing with the brand new McLaren Formula 3000 team at Spanish track Albacete last week.

Heidfeld, who has tested for the McLaren Formula 1 team on numerous occasions this year, is thought to have made satisfactory progress. But next week he faces F3000 International Championship opposition for the first time at Barcelona on the outfit's maiden public appearance.

The team's title has still to be made public, but an official launch is expected following winter testing.

Calderari to jump GT ship for ISRS

Swiss tin-top veteran Enzo Calderari, runner-up in the 1995 Global Endurance GT Series, is set to join the exodus from the FIA GT Championship to the new International Sports Racing Series.

Gentleman driver Calderari and partner Lillian Bryner tested a Kremer-Porsche K8 at Jarama on Monday with a view to making the switch next season.

Calderari, who has run GT2 Porsches since the revival of GT racing in the early '90s, said: 'For private teams GT is finished. With the factories it is impossible to go GT1, and in GT2 you are always looking in your mirrors. The ISRS

could be a good place for us.'

Calderari, 45, could become the first European to run a Riley & Scott, winner of the Daytona and Sebring US sportscar blue ribands in '95.

'We have talked to Riley & Scott, but we are also looking at a Ferrari 333SP,' he explained. 'It all depends on finance, because the Ferrari is an expensive car to run.'

Another possibility for Calderari is Kremer, which is aiming to replace its ageing K8s.

Series boss John Mangoletsi said interest in his series, which attracted 11 cars for its third pilot race at Jarama last weekend, was running at an all-time high.



Brian Smith impressed Edenbridge during an F3000 test at a damp Snetterton last week



Lupberger stays put for '98

British Formula 3000 team Edenbridge Racing has re-signed South African Werner Lupberger for his second season in the International Championship.

And Lupberger, who scored his best finish - fourth - in the seasonal finale at Jerez, is the subject of high hopes of team owner Peter Briggs.

'I am delighted to have kept hold of him,' said Briggs. 'He'll build on what he learned this season, when he improved from race to race.'

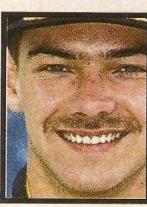
Briggs has a seat vacant alongside Lupberger - although 1997 driver

Max Wilson has said he would like to remain with the team, he has yet to secure a budget.

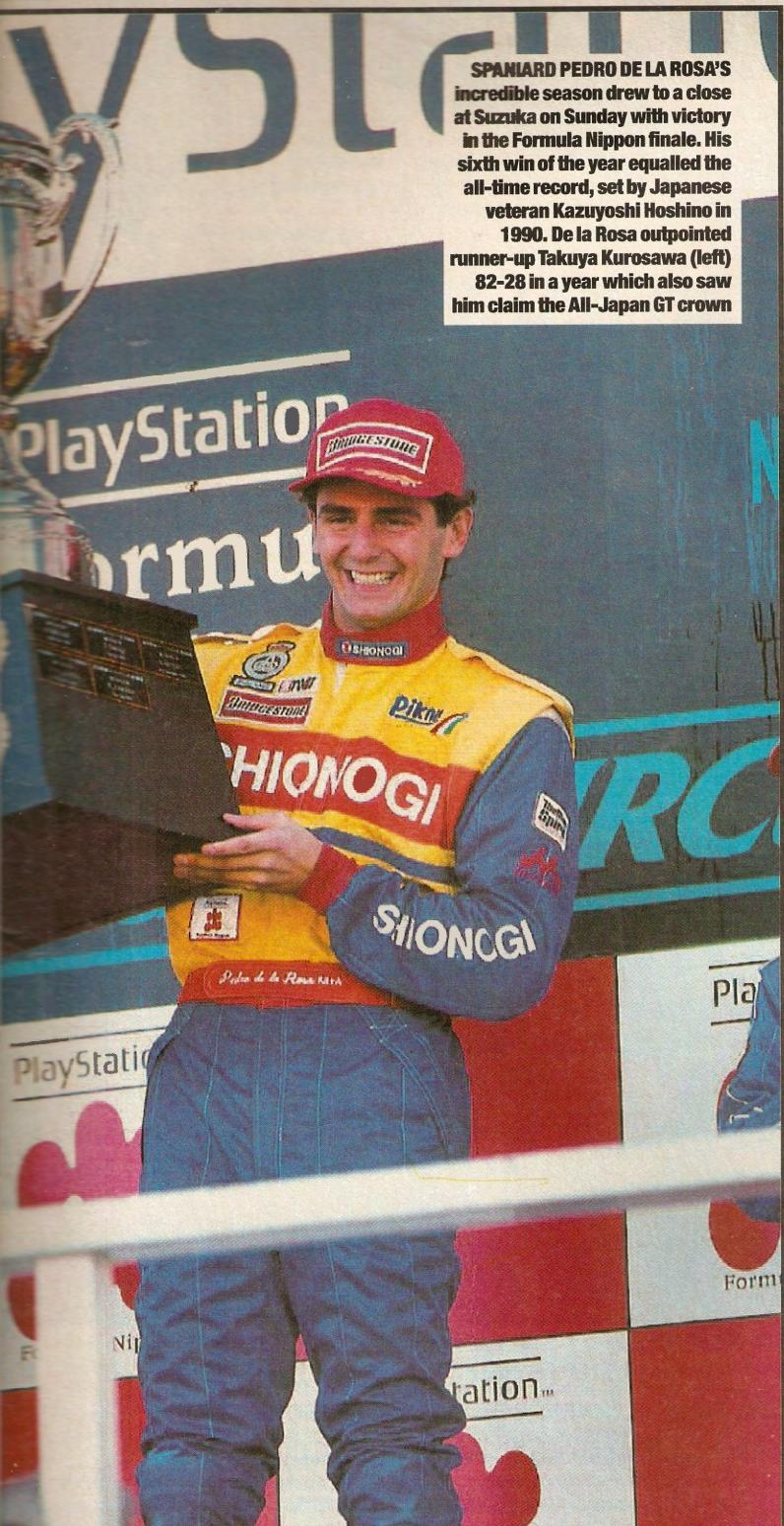
Argentinian Formula 3 racer Brian Smith tested with the team at Snetterton last week, but was restricted by rain to just 15 laps.

'He did a workmanlike job,' said Briggs, 'the sort of professional approach I'd expect from someone who has a background in the British championship.'

Smith, Lupberger and - possibly - Wilson will drive with Edenbridge in the big F3000 test at Barcelona next week.



Lupberger: stays



Apomatox completes Prost link-up

The Prost Grand Prix team has signed a driver development agreement with French Formula 3000 outfit Apomatox.

Although Apomatox will retain its own identity and will remain wholly independent, Prost sporting director Cesare Fiorio will supervise the interests of his team in the F3000 programme.

Team boss Alain Prost said: 'Having a programme which followed younger drivers was part of my plan for Prost Grand Prix from the start. We want to develop talent for the future.'

Prost engineers worked with Apomatox last week at Magny-

Cours, when its driver evaluation programme began.

French Formula 3 front runners Stephane Sarrazin and Franck Montagny were joined by Paolo Ruberti, third in the Italian F3 series, and European Formula Opel Champion Marcelo Battistuzzi.

No official times were issued as the drivers performed on different days, but Sarrazin emerged fastest. 'They did a good job,' said Apomatox chief Dominique Delestre. 'We weren't just looking at speed but all aspects of their driving.'

British F3 runner-up Nicolas Minassian is expected to test at Barcelona next week.

SPANIARD PEDRO DE LA ROSA'S incredible season drew to a close at Suzuka on Sunday with victory in the Formula Nippon finale. His sixth win of the year equalled the all-time record, set by Japanese veteran Kazuyoshi Hoshino in 1990. De la Rosa outpointed runner-up Takuya Kurosawa (left) 82-28 in a year which also saw him claim the All-Japan GT crown

Lehto dismisses Indy talk after test

Finnish GT star JJ Lehto has tested with the Hogan Racing Indycar team, and lapped within a second of the Mid-Ohio track record.

But former Formula 1 racer Lehto, the '97 FIA GT runner-up with the BMW-backed Schnitzer McLaren team, has shelved any ambitions to contest the CART World Series. He described the test as 'not very serious', and is happy with his BMW programme for '98 (see page 12).

Hogan has been talking to Robby Gordon, who drove the team's Reynard-Mercedes in this year's California 500. But Gordon is considering setting up his own team.

Canada alters stance on tobacco legislation

Canada's government has made a U-turn on tobacco advertising in motorsport - like its British counterpart.

Health minister Allan Rock introduced legislation earlier this year banning tobacco advertising at all sporting events. But now he has caved in to lobbying from the organisers of the Canadian Grand Prix and the Toronto and Vancouver CART World Series Indycar rounds to permit tobacco logos on cars and racesuits at the country's major races.

There was heavy pressure from tobacco company Player's too, which sponsors the majority of up-and-coming Canadian talent.

Morelli ready for comeback

Northern Irish Formula 3000 racer Dino Morelli aims to drive in next week's big test at Barcelona, in what would be his first outing since sustaining serious leg injuries in a horrific accident five months ago at the Nurburgring.

'I can't wait to get back in a car,' said Morelli, who has arranged a test with the Belgian Astromega team and aims to make a full-time return to competition in '98. 'I just want to put the last few months behind me and get back on with it.'

'The doctors cleared me to drive a few weeks ago, but I didn't think at the time that I'd be able to do justice to the brakes in an F3000 car. But I can now.'

Meanwhile, the DKS team with which Morelli started the 1997 campaign has been forced into receivership.

Team principal Kevin Sherwood said: 'It's an unfortunate situation. We had to invest more than we anticipated at the start of the year. The collapse of the British F3000 series led us to starting an F3 programme for Tommy Field (Morelli's BF3000 team-mate). Then came Dino's crash, just as we were on the point of signing a deal with a major investor.'

'A variety of things conspired against us,' he added, 'but I'm proud of what we achieved in a short space of time.'

News In Brief

TOURING CARS

Peugeot's new-for-1998 British Touring Car Championship 406s will use Hewland gearboxes, replacing X-Trac.

BTCC boss Alan Gow will meet with tyre company Michelin and two BTCC manufacturers this week, in a bid to find some agreement on tyre supply policy for 1998.

Two BTCC teams failed to beat the rain last week. Nissan's David Leslie did around 12 laps at Pembrey, while Andy Rouse (below) visited Snetterton and Silverstone in a bid



to develop his Toyota Corolla Liftback, without success.

Nissan is understood to be ready to continue in the All-Japan Touring Car Championship next season, if the series goes ahead. Its future has been jeopardised by the pull-out of Honda, champion for the past two years.

INDYCAR

CART, the organisation which runs the World Series for Indycars, will announce soon that the generic term 'Indycars' will be dropped in favour of a return to 'Championship Cars' or the derivative 'Champ Cars'. The name pre-dates 'Indycars', going back to before World War 2. Courier service FedEx is expected to replace paint and glass manufacturer PPG as the series sponsor.

Tasman Motorsports engineer Don Halliday has switched to Team Green, where he will replace Tony Cicale as head of the team's technical programme. Cicale is taking a break from the sport.

The Indy Racing League has introduced safety changes in the wake of this year's spate of injuries. Smaller airboxes will allow for more cockpit padding, while gearbox bellhousings and rear crash structures will be revised.

INTERNATIONAL

The Dayton tyre company has taken over from sister firm Firestone as supplier to the Indy Lights series, which will be known as the PPG-Dayton Indy Lights Championship.

Dale Earnhardt Jr, son of NASCAR's legendary 'Intimidator', will contest the full Busch Grand National 'second division' series next year in a Chevrolet entered by Dale Earnhardt Inc.

Stage set for Atlanta shoot-out

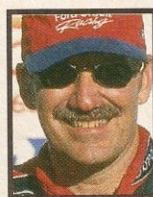
Three drivers fight out the final destination of this year's NASCAR Winston Cup in Atlanta on Sunday in what should be the fastest race of the season.

Although 1995 champion Jeff Gordon has a substantial 77-point lead in his Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet, any late slip-up could see Robert Yates Ford driver Dale Jarrett or Roush Racing Ford man Mark Martin steal in for their first title.

If Jarrett wins the finale, Gordon must only finish in the top 18. And if Martin wins, he has to rely on Gordon being outside the top 22 and Jarrett lower than third.

Jarrett, comparing his situation to the 1996 Masters golf tournament, said: 'You had two of the greatest players in the world, and Greg Norman was trying to protect his lead and Nick Faldo was doing everything he could to come from behind. And it did happen.'

In their concern not to interfere with the title struggle, NASCAR has decided not to introduce the superspeedway carburettor restrictor plates, despite testing speeds of close to 194mph on the



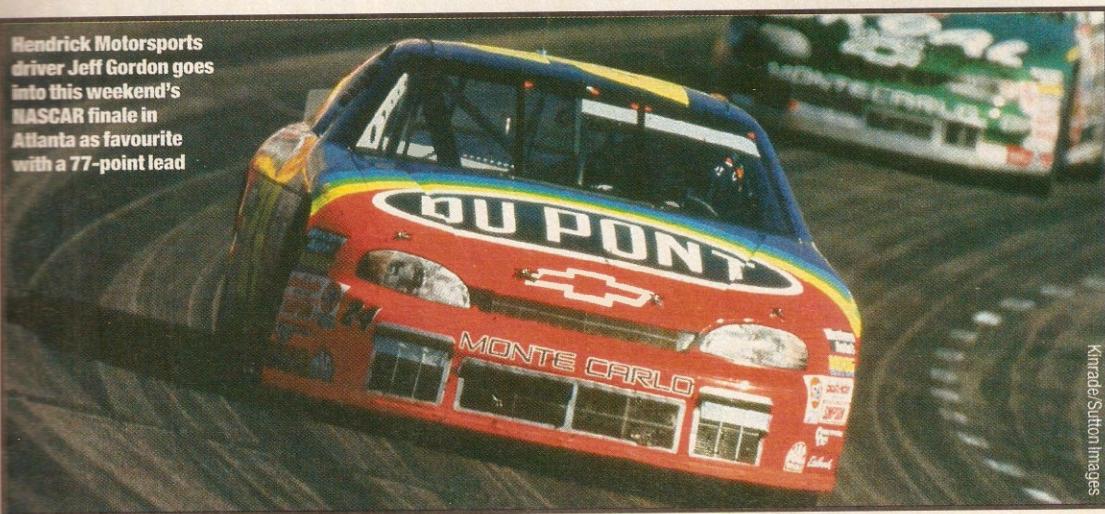
Jarrett: hopeful

resurfaced 1.54-mile Atlanta oval. Speeds at Daytona and Talladega, 2.5 and 2.66 miles long respectively, have been kept below 193mph by the plates since 1995.

Drivers have praised a new layout, which sees what was formerly a pure oval changed via a new dog-leg, similar to that on the Charlotte and Texas speedways, and slightly steeper banking.

Atlanta preview
Page 54

Hendrick Motorsports driver Jeff Gordon goes into this weekend's NASCAR finale in Atlanta as favourite with a 77-point lead



Kinrade/Sutton Images

Rahal spreads his wings to truck class

Three-time Indycar Champion Bobby Rahal has furthered links with his former sparring partner to run a team in NASCAR's Craftsman Truck Series.

Rahal, whose CART World Series team is expanding into Indy Lights next season, is combining with fellow 1970s Formula Atlantic star Tom Gloy to run a Ford F-150 for three-time winner Dave Rezendes. The Rahal/Gloy duo has also teamed up to run a Ford Mustang in the Trans-Am road racing series.

'Tom and I raced wheel-to-wheel for many years, and we've developed a good business relationship since those days,' said Rahal.

Zhuhai 'after dark' plan scuppers grid

The organisers of last weekend's GT invitation race at Zhuhai sprung a surprise when they announced the event would be run partly in darkness - a move that robbed the grid of a number of cars.

A number of Lamborghini one-make racers which were due to bolster what was generally regarded as a disappointing entry were forced to scratch from the race because they didn't have lights.

Porsche's Jurgen Barth, who masterminded bringing the European cars over for the race, said he was disappointed with the organisation of the event.

ProSport rework to go into production

Mark Bailey Racing, formerly a British Formula 3 stalwart, is aiming to produce replicas of the sports racing car it debuted in last weekend's International Sports Racing Series at Jarama.

Customer versions of the MBR 972, a heavily reworked version of the ProSport Spyder, which made its debut in this year's Daytona 24 Hours, will go on sale as a turn-key racer complete with a 300bhp-plus Ford V6, at £110,000.

Team boss Mark Bailey said: 'This car is very different to the Spyder underneath and it will be developed further for next season.'

US GT series buy-out gathers pace

Sportscar racing's US civil war could come to a swift conclusion within the next couple of weeks, if a projected buy-out of troubled series organiser Professional SportsCar Racing goes ahead as planned.

Insiders at SportsCar, which is owned by controversial US motorsport high-roller Andy Evans, claim that when the buyout is formally announced, the rival United States Road Racing Championship, floated by Daytona boss Bill France Jr, will be canned.

'It looks as though it is all going to happen this week, when we should have a calendar for next year,' said

one SportsCar insider. 'And we believe that once France sees what we have to offer, we'll hear no more about the USRRC.'

Plans for the buyout - which will involve key SportsCar officials Doug Robinson and John McLoughlin and some-time GTS racer Les Delano, a New York advertising boss - have gained momentum with the news that the teams from the World Sports Car series are likely to spurn the USRRC's advance.

The insider said: 'We have been getting more and more calls from the teams asking us to do something because they have heard

nothing from the USRRC.'

One WSC team manager said: 'The USRRC has given us nothing. We have seen no rules, no dates. And there is a definite interest among the competitors to go with SportsCar.'

But a spokesman for the Sports Car Club of America, which has been slated to run the USRRC, said it was pushing ahead with the plans for its rival series in 1998.

The SCCA will, however, sanction France's Daytona 24 Hours, although that is unlikely to prevent it being the opening round of next year's SportsCar series.

News In Brief

FORMULA 3000

Lola Formula 1 refugee and Indy Racing League contender Vincenzo Sospiri continued to stand in for Argentinian Esteban Tuero in the Formula Nippon finale at Suzuka on Sunday. The Italian, 1995 champion in the F3000 International Championship for similar cars, finished 15th in the Le Mans Company Reynard-Mugen.

Italian Formula Renault racer Giorgio Vinella tested for Bob Salisbury Engineering at Snetterton last week and for Coloni Motorsport at Vallelunga on Monday.

Vinella is one of six drivers set to drive for Super Nova at Barcelona next week. The others are established F3000 campaigners Stephen Watson, Gaston Mazzacane and Boris Derichbourg and F3 drivers Mario Haberfeld and Ben Collins.

Arden Motorsport co-founder Dave Luff has sold his shareholding in the fledgling F3000 team, which has now relocated to engineer Roly Vincini's Norfolk premises.

SPORTSCARS

The non-championship invitation GT race in Curitiba run by three-time Formula 1 World Champion Nelson Piquet will go ahead after all - early next year. Piquet's Brasilia track, which hosted one-half of a GT double-header in 1996, could also host a race.

Sportscar stalwart Jan Lammers will drive an Elise-based Lotus GT1 in the Bologna motor show sprint event early next month in what is likely to be the factory Lotus team's final competitive outing before it shuts its doors.

FORMULA 3

British F3 regular Michael Bentwood has re-signed for a third season with the Silverstone-based Speedsport team.

Dutch and Benelux Formula Ford Champion Christijan Albers tested



for Van Amersfoort Racing (above) at Zandvoort last week. The 18-year-old matched the target time set by the team's German championship contender Bas Leinders.

British Formula Renault Champion

Marc Hynes was given a second chance to prove himself with the Renault UK-backed Promatecme team on Wednesday last week, after he complained of food poisoning at the previous multi-driver test.



Adam Wilcox underwent an impressive maiden Formula 3 test at Snetterton last week with Martin Donnelly Racing

Wilcox test opens F3 door

Formula Opel European Union Series runner-up Adam Wilcox's hopes of moving up to the AUTOSPORT British Formula 3 Championship next season took a major boost when he had an impressive test at Snetterton with Martin Donnelly Racing last week.

The McLAREN/AUTOSPORT BRDC Young Driver finalist lapped the Norfolk track in 1m09.47s in one of the team's Dallara-Opel F397s, the same time as MDR's Snetterton race winner Mario Haberfeld managed in an Intersport Racing Dallara on the same day - the Brazilian was testing a development Spiess-tuned Opel engine.

Twenty-one-year-old Wilcox, the winner of three of the last four FOEUS races with his family-run Wilcox Motorsport team, said: 'I was 0.6s off Mario in the morning, but after I matched his time he went off trying to go quicker. The car seems to suit my style. I have a few chances to move up. I've got the budget to run with (Silverstone team) Speedsport, but not MDR yet.'

A test at Silverstone the following day was ruined by bad weather, but the Midlander is due to test for Speedsport tomorrow (Friday) at the track, and then plans a run with Speedsport neighbour Alan Docking Racing later in the year.

Richard Styles

Macau F3 Grand Prix Preview

Firman ready to prove a point

Last year's Macau Formula 3 Grand Prix winner Ralph Firman returns to the Portuguese enclave this weekend confident he can silence the critics who claimed that he was an undeserving victor last season.

The 22-year-old Briton, who raced in Japan's Formula Nippon series this season, made a spectacular return to the Paul Stewart Racing team two weeks ago and left this season's front runners trailing in his Dallara-Mugen's wake at the Croft test.

'The Macau Grand Prix is always

going to be difficult to win,' says Firman, 'particularly against the cream of the world's F3 drivers in the cars they have raced all year.'

Firman's win last season came despite ending the second heat in the barriers after a clash with French F3 Champion Soheil Ayari, who has also been invited back to the showcase event to race with new French champion Patrice Gay at Graff Racing.



Firman: defence

Firman's PSR team mate, British F3 Champion Jonny Kane, will try to atone for disappointment in the other blue riband race, the Marlboro Masters of Zandvoort, as will German title winner Nick Heidfeld with Opel Team BSR. But the dark horse has to be Masters winner and All-Japan champion Tom Coronel. The Dutchman starred last year at Macau and will be tough to beat in the TOM'S Dallara-Toyota.

TOM'S set to run Dallaras for '98

Anglo-Japanese Formula 3 team TOM'S GB is ready to abandon its own chassis in favour of a Dallara in order to attract top drivers for next season's AUTOSPORT-backed British F3 championship.

The TOM'S 037F has had an inconsistent season this year, regularly showing vast differences in performance from circuit to circuit.

This, claimed TOM'S boss Hiroshi Fushida, means drivers who are challenging for the championship are afraid to take a chance on a car that is different from that driven by their rivals. 'We have to give drivers what they

want, and that means offering them the option of running a Dallara,' said Fushida.

'But I do not believe that our chassis doesn't work. The testing restrictions we have had this year have meant that it has been very difficult to go racing and do chassis development. If we run Dallaras and develop the 1999 chassis separately then it's okay.'

Fushida refused to rule out the possibility that Martin O'Connell, whose Rowan Racing team was helping iron out the problems suffered by the 037F at the end of this season, will conduct the development.

Results stand after scrutiny

The Martin Donnelly Racing, Fortec Motorsport and TOM'S GB Formula 3 teams have been given a clean bill of health following technical checks relating to the penultimate round of the AUTOSPORT-backed British championship at Silverstone on October 5.

The results of the tests on the teams' ECUs, which had been removed in response to growing speculation that some teams were running illegal launch control and automatic gearchange systems, mean that there will be no change to the championship's final score.

The highest affected driver in the standings would have been sixth-

placed Mario Haberfeld.

The examinations of the on-board computer systems by Liverpool Data Research Associates, which has been used by the Formula 1 and British Touring Car championships, reported that the ECUs were 'found to comply with both the championship regulations and the FIA (the governing body of world motorsport) policy.'

Top teams Paul Stewart Racing, Promatecme and Alan Docking Racing had already passed the tests.

The year's rookie teams
Page 84

Vatanen wins Citroen's finale

Ari Vatanen successfully clinched this year's FIA Cross Country World Championship with a five minute win over his Citroen team mate Pierre Lartigue on the UAE Desert Challenge.

Citroen's masterplan was that Vatanen and Lartigue would not fight each other, as the team had only entered this final round of the series to ensure that Citroen added the manufacturers' crown to the drivers' title that would automatically go to the winner of the event. However, Citroen's plan did not need to be put into operation as Lartigue (the reigning raid champion) lost a lot of time on the opening section of the Dubai-based event and Vatanen (partnered by Fred Gallagher) was able to cruise to a relatively easy win.

Such was Citroen's domination of the event that the ZX pairing finished almost three hours



Ives (left) and Parker with Vatanen

clear of the third placed crew.

Vatanen and Gallagher are now preparing for the Network Q RAC Rally, Vatanen contesting the event and Gallagher Clerk of the Course.

The Dubai event was Citroen's final outing in rally raid competition, ending a 'career' which began at the Baja Espana in July 1990 after Citroen took over the mantle of raid competition from its stablemate Peugeot.

Since that date, Citroen has contested 42 events and won 36 of them, taking five World Championships along the way.

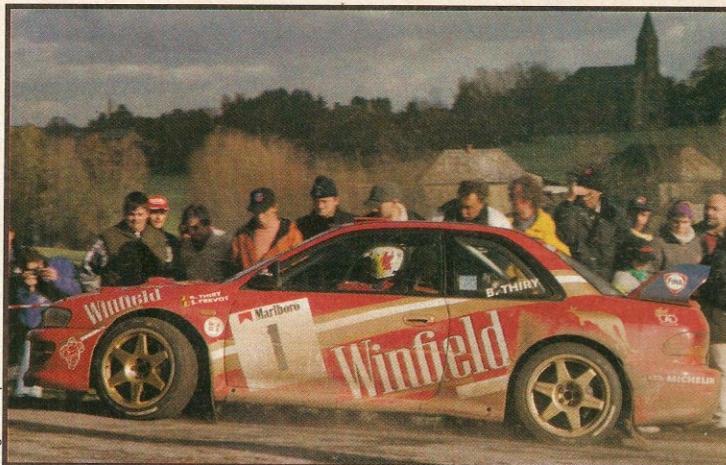
Somewhat further back from Vatanen and Lartigue was the British crew of Bob Ives and David Parker in their Ilion Land Rover.

They were up to sixth on the final day before a propshaft failed 40kms into a 160kms stage. The intrepid duo continued after replacing the damaged part and finished 24th.

Ari Vatanen and Fred Gallagher stormed the Middle East desert at the weekend and clinched this year's FIA Cross Country Championship



Tony North



Hugh Bishop
Victory for Bruno Thiry in Condroz further strengthened his claim for a Ford drive in '98

Thiry stakes claim for Ford seat

Bruno Thiry's chances of driving for Ford in 1998 took an upturn at the weekend when the Belgian ace scored a 32-second victory on the Condroz Rally, the penultimate round of the FIA European Rally Championship.

Thiry is expected to be confirmed as number two to Juha Kankkunen in Ford's attack for 1998, although the team management would only say 'soon' when asked for a date for the announcement.

Thiry's (possibly) final drive in the Winfield-backed Subaru Impreza 555 saw him take a start to



Loix: Second spot

finish win over the Marlboro Toyota driver, but Patrick Snyers's hopes of getting among the pair were dashed with a first stage accident and turbo problems on the second test in his Bastos R-E-D Ford Escort WRC. That left him fighting back from seventh to third, ahead of Toyota's Renaud Verreydt.

Thiry drove for the factory Ford team in the second half of last season and is highly respected by Carlos Sainz, whose seat he will take.

**Carlos Sainz interview
Page 44**

McRae's Aussie win in detail

Colin McRae's win on API Rally Australia was bigger than the official timing would have us believe.

The organisers were trying out a new timing system using windscreen mounted transponders during the rally, testing the principle of timing to 100th of a second for possible use in the future.

Officially McRae won the event in 4h5m31s, but the timing systems used by the Australian event showed a more accurate time of 4h5m39.80s instead.

The Scot's winning margin over

Tommi Makinen was officially six seconds but, with the Finn clocking 4h5m48.00s on the electronic scoring, the gap was slightly larger than the official figure.

Fears that the traditional timing system might actually give a false winner were happily unfounded, but the fact that Didier Auriol visibly beat Carlos Sainz on the opening stage at Langley Park yet recorded the same time (it was actually 8/10ths faster) showed why the system of timing to the nearest second is being changed for 1998.



Electronic timing



McKlein
Colin McRae's Australia victory margin was slightly larger than the official figure

News in Brief

The RAC MSA has issued the definitive start list for the Network Q RAC Rally. In accordance with rules that demand the World Championship leader is first car away, Tommi Makinen will lead the field on Sunday November 23, with his title rival Colin McRae second. Carlos Sainz, Kenneth Eriksson, Juha Kankkunen and Richard Burns complete the list of manufacturers' registered drivers.

The new Timor World Rally Car is currently under construction at Prodrive's Banbury headquarters. Testing will begin in March and the car may compete on the final three rounds of next season's World Championship.

ITV Formula 1 pundit Tony Jardine has enlisted the help of his pals for his Network Q RAC Rally effort. Jordan Grand Prix designer Gary Anderson will head the service crew for Jardine's RAC Insurance Direct/DC Cook Escort Cosworth. His crew will include three Arrows-Yamaha employees, including Damon Hill's former race engineer Martin Bourne. Jardine is aiming to win the Fleet Street award for the third successive year.

Julian Porter will be partnered by Claire Mole in his Mitsubishi Lancer E3 on the Network Q RAC Rally. Last year Mole had to help Porter out of an icy ditch...

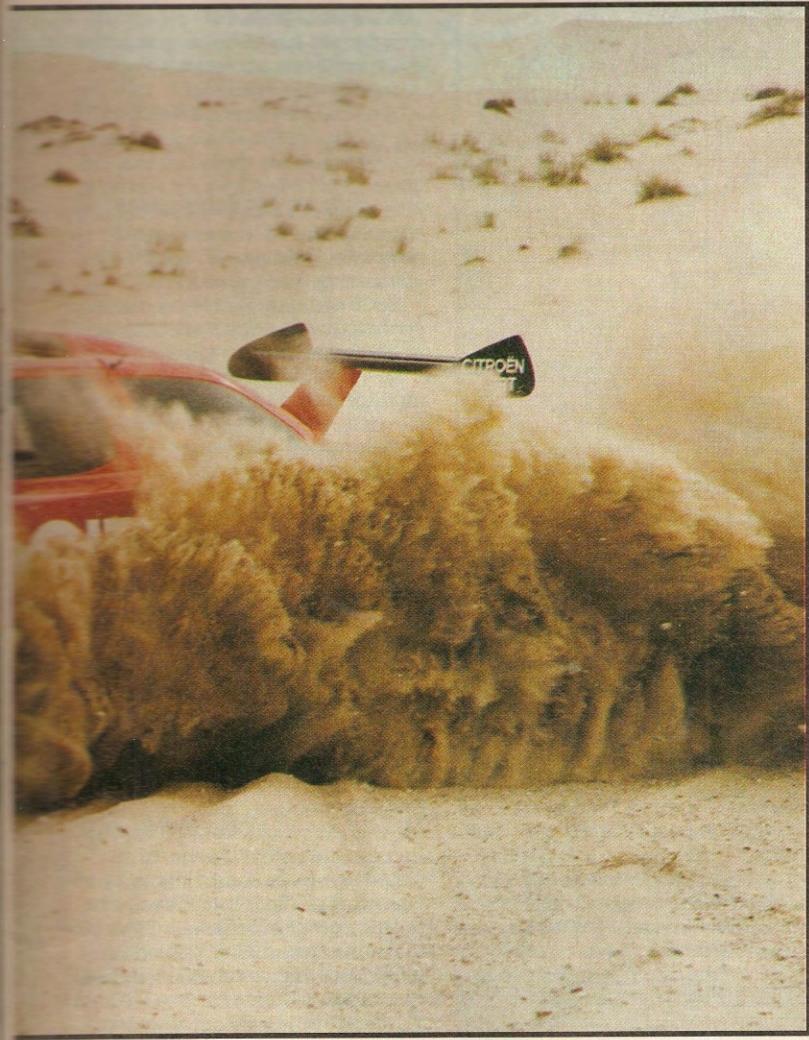
Citroen's Patrick Magaud is only two points clear of Peugeot's Gilles Panizzi with just one event, the Rally du Var, to go in the French Championship.

Raimund Baumschlager gave VW an historic result, winning Formula 2 on the Semperit Rally in the first works-entered turbo diesel car.

ESPN2 is to continue its support for the Michelin PRO Rally Championship in the USA. The TV station covered six events this season and hopes to expand that to all nine next year.

Ford has added two extra dates to its open forums for prospective KA Rally series competitors next year. It is essential to book a place for either November 26 or December 3 with Kevin Shortis on 01323 890184. Price reductions for the kit of parts means that, for 1998, a car can be put on the stages for between £15,000-17,000.

Peugeot is set to relaunch its Rally Challenge in the year 2000 when the new 206 model is ready and tested. In the meantime the company has suspended the series after a hugely successful decade and replaced it with a generous bonus scheme that could earn a driver £5000 for winning the Peugeot BTRDA Gold Star Championship. Full details of the scheme are obtainable from Stella Boyles on 01203 884674.



AUTOSPORT goes rallying on the RAC

The AUTOSPORT name will be carried on two cars in the upcoming Network Q RAC Rally.

Roger Duckworth and Mike Rimmer will drive a pair of Subarus from the Autosportif stable, Duckworth's in Group A trim and Rimmer's contesting Group N.

Duckworth, son of Cosworth founder Keith, finished 13th overall on last year's snowy event and this season has taken fourth in the Mintex National series.

Rimmer has tackled the RAC Rally four times before, on his last attempt finishing 17th overall and third in Group N in 1993.



Mike Rimmer's Group N Subaru in its AUTOSPORT colours at Blenheim Palace last week

Citroen for British campaign?

Citroen could join the ranks of the Mobil 1 British Rally Championship next season if moves to find a British team to run the Xsara kit car come to fruition.

Widnes-based R-E-D have been approached by Citroen with a view to campaigning the new 2-litre kit-car and the team is considering its options. We understand that the plan would be to campaign the Xsara on the full British Championship and also the Network Q RAC Rally.

It would not be the first time that Citroen was represented in



Head: British bid

Britain. The team campaigned a four-wheel drive Visa Mille Pistes for Mark Lovell over a decade ago, but the marque never truly caught on among British rally crews.

R-E-D is also chasing the task of running Ford's British F2 programme, probably with Robbie Head at the wheel, but at the moment neither company has come forward with a confirmed programme.

Meanwhile, R-E-D will concentrate on running Finnish ace Ari Vatanen on the upcoming Network Q RAC Rally.

Meet the stars at the rally show

The Network Q RAC Rally show on Saturday, November 22 offers rally fans a fantastic opportunity to rub shoulders with the men and machines that will decide the outcome of this year's World Rally Championship.

The gates to Cheltenham Racecourse open at 1000 and the host for the day, TV presenter Mike Smith, launches the event at 1015.

From then until the gates close at 1800, there will be a wide variety of displays and activities ranging from stunt driving from the brilliant Russ Swift through to interviews with Colin McRae and Tommi Makinen and a lunchtime parachute drop by the Red Devils.

Rally action itself includes, on Saturday, the RAC Historic Rally at 1115 on the rally stage within the racecourse and, of course, the venue will play host to the start and opening stage of the rally the following day.

Indeed, the rally show is effectively a two-day affair as Sunday sees not only two stages of the event taking place in the racecourse, but also live links from the other stages interspersed with another dose of displays from Swift and also Mitsubishi's 'Flying Shogun' (where a light aircraft is launched from the roof of the off-roader).

Sunday's action opens at 0600 and closes at 2030.

Blomqvist set to miss out on RAC Rally run

Stig Blomqvist's Network Q RAC Rally entry is in jeopardy after the Skoda team failed to change the car details in time.

Skoda's original entry was for an Octavia kit car, but the team quickly decided to swap this for one of the more reliable Felicias. However, while it is possible to change classes (in this case from the 2-litre class to the 1600cc one) before entries close, Skoda left it too late. A decision is being made this week whether to run Blomqvist in the 'wrong' class or to withdraw and leave Skoda's effort solely to Melissa Heijink and Anna Tait.

AUTOSPORT

SENDING OUT THE WRONG MESSAGE

Tit wasn't pre-meditated, but it was deliberate, according to the sport's governing body, the FIA. Michael Schumacher *deliberately* tries to take Jacques Villeneuve out of the European Grand Prix in Jerez, but escapes with little more than a tickle on the wrist.

Given that his action was deemed deliberate, and given what could have happened, surely the punishment should reflect that? We would suspect that seven days helping the FIA out on road safety issues, plus the loss of his runner-up spot in this year's world championship is not going to cause too many more sleepless nights for the double world champion.

What concerns us most is the message the decision gives out to every single person who takes part in competitive motorsport, and the signal it transmits to a public bombarded by negative images of Formula 1 over the past few days.

Having seen what happened to Michael, how many junior karters will now begin to think that deliberately taking off your opponents is a calculated risk worth taking? And how badly damaged will the sport's credibility be in the mind of your average armchair F1 fan? Certainly, from the flurry of faxes and telephone calls that arrived in our office in the immediate aftermath of the decision, there is a real sense of disbelief over just how lightly Schumacher got off.

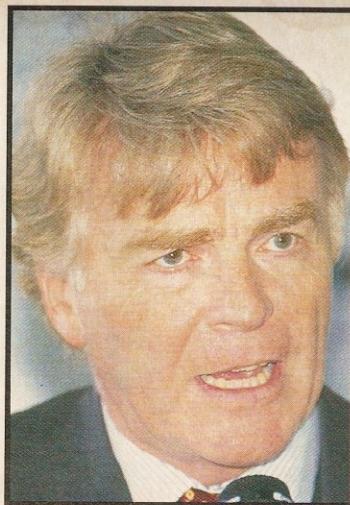
We are not saying that Michael Schumacher should have been made a scapegoat just because of who he is - far from it, in fact - but in a week when the F1 boat could do with some serious steadyng, the decision reached and the resulting punishment hardly seem designed to deflect further criticism.

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Mosley is embroiled in the tobacco furore

Tobacco tradition

Exactly why has there been so much argument about tobacco sponsorship in Formula 1?

Tobacco advertising has been an integral part of the F1 scene for many years (remember those fantastic JPS Lotuses?). For better or for worse, it is an excellent medium for tobacco companies to advertise with, projecting an image of speed, glamour, power and so forth.

Yet at the same time, it is entirely down to the individual whether or not he or she smokes (I don't).

So must we really have our intelligence insulted by the Government and FIA?

Tony Saraceno
Bedford

Setting the record straight

Last week's decision by the government to exempt motor racing from the tobacco advertising ban sparked a wave of uninformed and illogical splurge from the public, media and politicians themselves, who do not understand that motor racing is a business, not a sport.

It was a very simple logical decision on two counts. Firstly, the British motorsport industry leads the way in construction, technology, success and safety. The loss of all Grand Prix from European Union countries would inevitably see this position eroded, as the emphasis of the industry shifted to Asia, and we would lose up to 200,000 jobs and vast export revenues.

Despite this sacrifice, would we have less tobacco advertising on television? No. EU regulations mean the cars run here in tobacco brand colours but no brand names, but there are no such restrictions elsewhere in the world and we would have even more tobacco advertising on our screens.

The government showed common sense and should be applauded for having the courage to reverse a decision which they'd made without proper knowledge of all the facts.

Sarah Marsh
Southport

A question of sport

Why risk an overtaking manoeuvre in Formula 1, 1997-style, when it can all happen in the pits?

This year was a fairly monotonous series of processions. When did two cars actually 'race' each other, in the conventional sense of the word?



A '98 spec 'narrow' McLaren on grooved tyres. Could the FIA go further to aid competition?

I suppose it's too much to hope that next year's change to treaded tyres and narrow cars might herald the start of a proper racing year.
Terry Wheeler
Leigh-on-Sea, Essex

Beleaguered but proud

As a fan of Formula 1, I feel seriously beleaguered after what's happened in the past week in the pages of the national newspapers and on TV.

I expected Schumacher to make the sports pages a few times, but front page stories on tobacco u-turns, alleged 'match-rigging' and the latest from the waste of space that is the Senna trial... Wow, I didn't realise the sport had stored up that much bad karma. Or did the boys from Fleet Street decide to flex their collective muscle and declare open season on Grand Prix racing?

In a way I suppose I'm quite proud that I follow a sport which is so newsworthy. Stick that in your pipe and smoke it (while you can, that is...) cricket, snooker, darts and the rest of you.

Matthew Hall
Hull

The power of F1?

When I first started following Formula 1 racing, I never considered that it might help bring a government down one day.

Maybe that's an exaggeration, but I tell you what, if I was a betting man, I'd put my money on those clever old foxes Max Mosley and Bernie Ecclestone to come out of the whole tobacco advertising saga smelling a whole lot fresher than your government will.

Here's to common sense, and all who sail in her.

Ron Allard
New Jersey

Growing old gracefully

In a world where ego is often in inverse proportion to talent, thank God for Jackie Stewart!

Not only is the man a perfect gentleman and a fountain of common sense, as his comments on the Jerez incident show, but he is also a bloody good racer.

Think of it: 24 years after retirement and seven years after having last driven an F1 car, Stewart



jumps in and reels off a few laps of Silverstone's national circuit in 46 seconds or so. Not content with that, Stewart tried a BTCC Mondeo

for the first time, lapping within two seconds of Jason Plato's time.

All this from a man who is 58 and claims not to want to push himself



Despite winning three CART races this year, Paul Tracy has been shown the door at Penske

What the papers say with Keith Oswin

Where do we start this week? Front page, back page, political section, comment or even the obituaries? Formula 1 didn't so much get in the papers as write the whole damned lot. There were more stories than you could shake a fag packet at...

It all started at the end of last week, when F1 got its reprieve on tobacco advertising from the government.

Then we had the first hint of sleaze when it became known that the ministers involved had rather closer links with the sport than Her Majesty's government might have liked.

On Saturday the world exploded with a curious blend of stories in *The Times*. For no apparent reason, The



Thunderer gave its front page lead story to allegations that the result of the Jerez race was fixed in some way between Williams and McLaren, something the world had spotted a couple of weeks earlier of course...

Further inside we had the 'Jerez tapes' scandal, transcripts of conversations between Ferrari pit crews to Schuey and Williams' Jock

Clear to Villeneuve.

It all seemed a curious affair, the world's biggest non-story. After all, until the FIA adopts the same rules as the Jockey Club, such things will always go on.

The oddity was that, buried on page two, was a far more serious allegation that the on-board camera footage supplied to the Italian court in the Senna case was cut short. Bernie Ecclestone and three other TV officials are currently at risk of charges of perjury, says the article. Subsequently we understand that Ecclestone is suing the prosecutor for his remarks, so we'll skip smartly on...

By Monday the whole matter of

any more. What would his times be like if he were really trying? It shows that true talent never vanishes.

Nigel Knights
London

Oh no, what have I done?

Roger Penske has made a tremendous mistake. Perhaps the paperwork got mixed up, but the team has fired the wrong driver.

Penske couldn't possibly have wanted to get rid of Paul Tracy, with three 1997 race wins under his belt. Little Al hasn't won for two years. In fact, he's normally watching Tracy from the sidelines by the halfway mark of most races.

The on track results simply don't justify what has just occurred. Or am I missing something?

Joseph Daudish
Illinois

The BTCC's rebirth

Many congratulations are due to TOCA for its prompt reaction to the wishes of BTCC spectators for closer action during races.

The new format with pit stops and qualifying shoot-outs is bound to liven up the series and bring even greater numbers of viewers to what was already an extremely successful championship.

Teams with smaller budgets have also been thought of, since high-tech, costly wheel-changing gizmos will not be allowed, and hopefully all teams can use the best tyres.

It was refreshing to see that the majority of drivers and teams were in favour of the new regulations as well. A lot has been written about the absence of genuine competition and 'sportsmanship' from motor racing, but at least in the BTCC, the drivers clearly want to race.

It is not true that closer competition is disadvantageous to the top teams, it just makes their success more notable.

Nick Thomas
Cardiff

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donations to the Labour party from Formula 1 was national news. On Tuesday, as the world looked towards Mecca (better known as Motor Sports House in Colnbrook) to await the outcome of the hearing over Schumacher's actions in Jerez, and also now an investigation into match rigging by Williams and McLaren, Bernie got his cheque back from that nice Mr Blair.

Somehow it was quite a relief to be reminded by an *FHM* interview with Jordan commercial director Ian Phillips of the more innocent days (!) of F1 when girls could gain access to Brazilian paddocks simply by proving she wasn't wearing any knickers. Swipe me...

Autogate



NIGEL ROEBUCK

Scene one: 'What I'm proposing,' says the Minister of Health, 'is a complete ban on cigarette advertising, including all forms of sponsorship.' The Prime Minister agrees. Scene two: PM discusses the matter with the Minister of Sport, who is not keen. Scene three: 'Since we spoke last,' says the PM to the Minister of Health, 'I'm afraid I've encountered a few problems...' Minister of Health threatens to resign. 'How would you like that big job at the Treasury?' 'Well, my proposals on smoking wouldn't be dropped, would they?' 'Absolutely not.' In that case, I'll take it. Scene four: 'We in government have to be realists,' the PM beams at the Minister of Sport. 'How would you like to be Minister of Health?'

Life indeed imitates art to some degree. This exchange, between Jim Hacker and others, comes from an episode of *Yes Prime Minister*, broadcast several years ago. Can't think why it came back to me last week. Perhaps it was the title of the episode that rang a distant bell: *Smoke Screen*.

Predictably, since the announcement that Formula 1 was to be exempt from the proposed ban on tobacco sponsorship of sport, there has been all manner of outrage in the newspapers. Smokers are considered the last outlaws in a lunatic world which hastens to find excuses for muggers and the like, so we shouldn't be surprised. No, I'm not saying smoking is other than a stupid habit, merely that I find strange what constitutes intolerable behaviour in the late '90s.

One way and another, 'the media' hasn't known which way to turn - when it comes to racing-related topics - in recent days. I can't recall this level of general interest in F1 before, and the pity is that none of the stories covered has brought other than adverse publicity to it.

It is Monday afternoon as I write, and tomorrow I shall spend camped out in Colnbrook, to hear not only the outcome of the World Motor Sport Council's deliberations on Michael Schumacher's attempt to remove Jacques Villeneuve from the European Grand Prix, but also its thoughts on the alleged collusion between McLaren and Williams in the same event. What was the title of that *Yes Minister* episode again?

The Times ran an immensely self-congratulatory front page lead on Saturday, entitled 'Tapes point to fixing of grand prix', following which Williams and McLaren personnel were summoned - at 24 hours' notice - to join the Herr Schumacher bill in Colnbrook.

Reproduced in the paper were transcriptions of taped conversations between Villeneuve and his Williams race engineer Jock Clear, and between Schumacher and Ferrari's technical director Ross Brawn. Not revealed was how *The Times* had come by these tapes.

The allegation against the teams was that they 'together arranged the result of the European Grand Prix', which rather gives the impression that Mika Hakkinen and David Coulthard were pencilled in for a one-two even before the red lights went out.

Anyone with eyes and a TV set could see that Jacques was hardly impeding them on the final lap, and at the press conference afterwards he was quite open about it. 'Mika stayed out of the battle in the first part of the race, when he was quicker than me,' he said, 'and when he caught me, it was a question of risking going off with my car handling strangely, or seeing if he made a move, and then letting him through. David was also very close, so I didn't fight him, either.'

'Mika and David could have pushed me at the start of the race, when they were quicker,' Jacques concluded, 'so I didn't play any dirty tricks on them - it was better to let them through.' A degree of collusion between the two teams was widely suspected that very evening at Jerez - indeed we wrote as much in our race reports that week - so quite why it took *The Times* a fortnight to go to town on it remains unclear. One doesn't, of course, know when 'The Jerez Tapes' came into the journal's possession, any more than one knows - beyond an educated guess - the reason for their being handed over. *Smoke Screen*, was it, that episode?

The other week Jackie Stewart said he really didn't care for the apparent agreement between Williams and McLaren in Spain, and most of us agreed with him, even if we had some sympathy for the reasons which may have led to it. Other than not hustling Villeneuve early in the race, though, one can't truly see how McLaren materially aided Williams's cause.

I am told that, at tomorrow's hearings, Ferrari is expected to suggest Hakkinen and Coulthard worked to keep Eddie Irvine from threatening Villeneuve. Excuse me? Until the final, slow lap Irvine was nowhere near the McLarens, let alone

the Williams, and, in the course of it, lost fourth place to Gerhard Berger. And lest we forget, on lap 31 Norberto Fontana's Ferrari-powered Sauber let Schumacher through, then delayed Villeneuve, to the tune of 2.5 seconds. Collusion between Ferrari and Sauber? Paranoia, surely.

Perhaps I'm being naive, but, had Villeneuve's car been undamaged in the fracas with Schumacher, I cannot believe Jacques would not have gone on to win the race. As Stewart put it, 'He may have felt magnanimous - but not that magnanimous! He knew his car was in no shape to fight, and he made the right decision.'

Much was made of a remark by Patrick Head to Clear on the penultimate lap: 'To repeat, Jock. We are more concerned with the championship than the race position.' This sounds like common sense, rather than anything sinister, particularly from a man with more integrity than most of the paddock put together.

Snapshot from the past: in the deciding race of the 1983 World Championship at Kyalami, Nelson Piquet's rival for the title, Alain Prost, retired at half-distance, whereupon Nelson backed off in the lead, allowing not only his Brabham team mate Riccardo Patrese to pass, but also Niki Lauda's McLaren (which ultimately retired) and Andrea de Cesaris's Alfa Romeo (which finished second). The championship, not the race, Piquet said, was what .

mattered: he had needed three points to be ahead of Prost, and he got four.

It was a pragmatic decision, and not what one cared to see, but at least Nelson did not win the title by attempting to shove his rival off the road. That means of resolving the World Championship still lay in the future.

Whatever happens with Williams and McLaren, I trust the World Motor Sport Council will not allow that matter to impinge upon the main business of the day. The apparent accommodation between two teams may, as Damon Hill put it, 'leave a nasty taste in the mouth,' but Schumacher's actions do rather more than that. Play back his on-car footage in slow motion, and then tell me it was just 'a racing incident.' For the sake of Grand Prix racing's credibility - and because he deserves it - I hope they hammer him. ■



Jacques Villeneuve heads the McLaren twins at Jerez prior to conceding his lead to Mika Hakkinen. Collusion or just plain common sense?

What's on...

...the track

Sun Nov 16**Macau Formula 3 (non-championship)**

Macau (P)

Macau Guia Super Touring (non-championship)

Macau (P)

NASCAR Winston Cup

Atlanta (USA), final round of 32

Mexican Formula 3000 Championship

Mexico City (MEX), final round of 12

Spanish Super Touring Championship

Barcelona (E), final round of eight

...the box

BBC 1**Mon Nov 17** 2240-2340 *On Side*

Damon Hill and Eddie Jordan are interviewed by John Inverdale

BBC 2**Thu Nov 13** 2030-2100 *Top Gear***Fri Nov 14** 1900-1930 *Top Gear*
Motorsport**ITV****Sat Nov 15** 1315-1415 *International Motor Racing*, magazine featuring GT and Formula 3000 action**EUROSPORT****Thu Nov 13** 0830-0930 *Motors*; 1000-1100 Qatar Intl. Rally; 1630-1700 Historic Paul Ricard Rally**Fri Nov 14** 0900-1100 *CART* review; 1900-2000 *BTCC* season review**Sun Nov 16** 1800-2130 *NASCAR*, LIVE from Atlanta, USA**Mon Nov 17** 1100-1300 *NASCAR* (rpt); 1600-1700 *Truck Racing* from Spain; 1800-2000 *Speedworld* magazine**Tue Nov 18** 0930-1100 *Speedworld*; 1600-1700 *Truck Racing*; 1700-1730 *Four Wheel Drive***Wed Nov 19** 1100-1200 *Karting*; 1200-1230 *Historic Paul Ricard Rally*; 1700-1800 *Motors* magazine; 1800-1900 *Drag Racing***SKY SPORTS 1****Mon Nov 17** 1900-2200 *World Motorsport* magazine**SKY SPORTS 3****Thu Nov 13** 1430-1530 *The Golden Age of Motor Racing***Sat Nov 15** 1300-1600 *World Motorsport*, magazine**Wed Nov 19** 2230-2330 *The Golden Age of Motor Racing***CEEFAX**

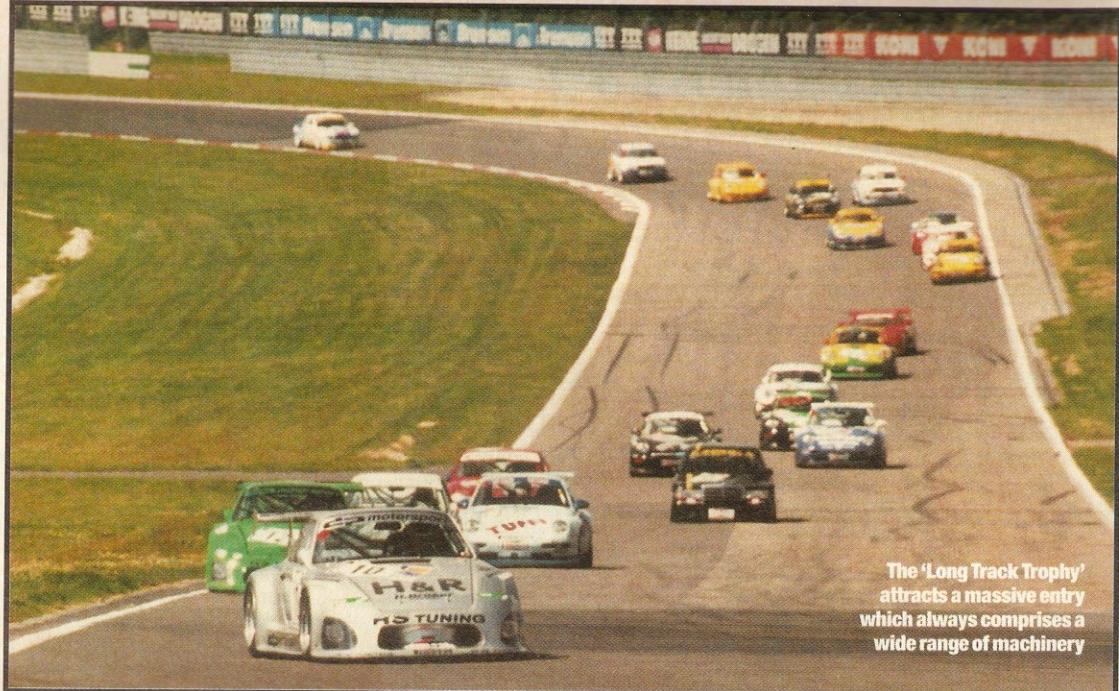
See page 360 for motorsport news

AOL

Keyword AUTOSPORT for the world's quickest motorsports service



Can Ralph Firman win again in Macau?



The 'Long Track Trophy' attracts a massive entry which always comprises a wide range of machinery

Nothing can prepare you for the Nurburgring

An ice-cold rainy afternoon is not a time to be outside in any country, but the German brand of cold is especially biting.

However, when the temptation to brave the elements is a lap of the full 14-mile Nordschleife circuit at the Nurburgring, most of us would probably agree to dispense with clothes altogether.

The final round of the Deutscher Veedol Langstreckenpokal or 'Long Track Trophy' provided a perfect reason to head for the Eifel mountains, and the offer of a drive was an added bonus. To a certain extent, one pit lane looks much like another, but you know you're in Germany by the extraordinary range of facial hair displayed by mechanics and drivers alike.

But the real clincher that you are at this monster of a track comes in the amount of cars in the pit lane. In the summer there are 180 cars in the race; even in winter it still only drops to 120. And the range of machinery makes you shake your head in disbelief. How, you ask yourself, will a Mercedes DTM car cope with an almost-standard Peugeot 106 when it arrives over a crest to find it in the way? It was a thought I put out of my head as I set off to 'learn' the track in a VW Golf road car.

No matter what anyone tells you, there is no adequate preparation for the experience of those 14 miles. I'm told that on Derek Bell's in-car video of the track he claims there are something like 157 corners, but the official line is 33 left-handers and 40 right-handers.

Inside line



**JAAMES
BAKER**
DEPUTY EDITOR

banked left hand curve on the inside and throws you out into a flat out blast.

After a few more laps I thought I knew what was coming next, but a little knowledge can be an enormously dangerous thing, and several times I arrived at a blind brow and braked for hairpins that were still a couple of miles up the road. That made me very nervous about going fast when the opposite could be true.

The only word to describe it is awesome.

The crowd is pretty remarkable too. They all religiously camp next to their favourite corners. You can tell where they like to be, because they have little 'friends of Wippermann' badges.

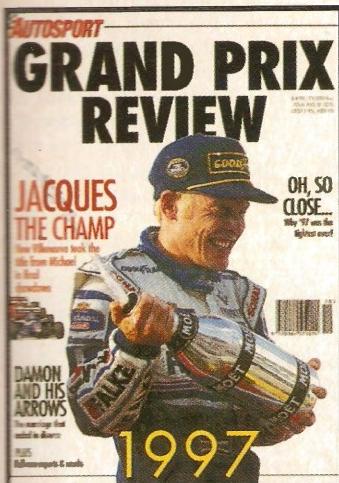
The drive never materialised, unfortunately, but I was kept happy with two laps as a passenger to local Porsche hero Edgar Doren. The 56-year-old is hugely popular with the crowd and his control of the Porsche 911 RSR on a terrifyingly slippery track with a low sun in his eyes was sublime. He explained the lines with gesticulations of his right hand while he drove with the other.

Thankfully we only went sideways a couple of times, and he chuckled as he brought the car back into line. When he climbed from seventh to hassle the 935 of Jürgen Alzen over the line on the first lap on a soaking circuit I knew I had been chauffeured by a master of this unforgiving place. When I return, maybe those tips might come in handy. Now let me see, was it right after the Kallenhard or left, or was it a straight... ■

Armchair enthusiast

AUTOSPORT Grand Prix Review 1997 Published by Haymarket, price £4.95. Available from all good newsagents

The 1997 Formula 1 season went out with a bang (literally), and only 10 days after the last wheel turned we have the AUTOSPORT Grand Prix Review to rekindle every memory. Phew! It's been the closest season for years, and through the articles and race reports of Grand Prix gurus Nigel Roebuck, Andrew Benson and Adam Cooper, you can relive the moments



Anniversaries



Treliés: 42

Nov 13: Chris Gilbert (born 1954), Masahiro Hasemi (b 1945)

Nov 14: David Higgins (b 1972), Irv Hoerr (b 1946), Brett Lunger (b 1945), Ted Prappas (b 1955), Eliseo Salazar (b 1954), Barrie Williams (b 1938)

Nov 15: Alan Docking (b 1946), Bruce Jenner (b 1942), Gustavo Treliés (b 1955), Jerry Unser (b 1932)

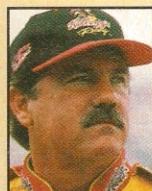
Nov 16: Tommy Archer (b 1954), Skip Barber (b 1936), Gianpaolo Dallara (b 1936), Roberto Guerrero (b 1958), Christian Horner (b 1973), Terry

Labonte (b 1956), Gerry Marshall (b 1941), Tazio Nuvolari (b 1892, died August 11 1953)

Nov 17: Chris Craft (b 1939), Damien Magee (b 1945), Domenico Schiattarella (b 1967), Antonio Simoes (b 1962)

Nov 18: Bob Ansell (b 1917), Gary Bettenhausen (b 1941),

Nov 19: Philippe Adams (b 1969), Jack Leconte (b 1959)



Labonte: 41

Then as now

■ 10 YEARS AGO

Nigel Mansell was still not fully recovered from his Suzuka practice shunt, leading to rumours in the Formula 1 paddock that Riccardo Patrese would occupy his 1988 seat at Williams a race early (AUTOSPORT, November 12, 1987).

Stateside, Geoff Bodine starred in a thrilling NASCAR race in the Winston 500 at Riverside. He led from pole, but dropped back under yellows, which led to a brilliant duel with champion Dale Earnhardt. And then, with 10 laps to go, Bodine's tyre burst, handing victory to Rusty Wallace, who led Benny Parsons home by just over a second.



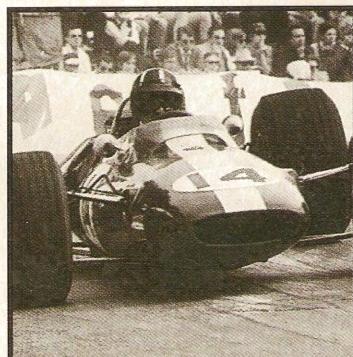
Geoff Bodine suffered at Riverside

■ 20 YEARS AGO

Ferrari launched its new 312T3 in Maranello, which incorporated a number of interesting mechanical and aerodynamic innovations (AUTOSPORT, November 17, 1977). It was cheekily suggested that the new Ferrari had a lot in common with the JPS Lotus. Enzo Ferrari grinned: 'I don't believe there is any such thing as a new invention. Everything is based on something that has come before.'

Riccardo Patrese won his first Formula 2 race in Japan, although he was helped by the Renault engine in Didier Pironi's Martini, which blew spectacularly, robbing Pironi of his 20-second lead and the two million yen first prize.

The Kyalami 1000km race was won by Hans Heyer and Jody Scheckter in a 2.0 Ford, although the fastest qualifiers were Harald Ertl and Klaus Ludwig in a BMW.



Graham Hill's Lotus was second at Jarama

■ 30 YEARS AGO

The very first Spanish Grand Prix at Jarama proved to be a race of attrition, as only three cars finished (AUTOSPORT, November 17, 1967). Jim Clark and Graham Hill's Lotus-DFVs were first and second, while Jack Brabham's BT24 soldiered on to third. Jackie Stewart had an uncharacteristic spin into the barriers. Jo Siffert had held third until the dying stages of the race, when the engine in his Lola chassis went terminally flat.

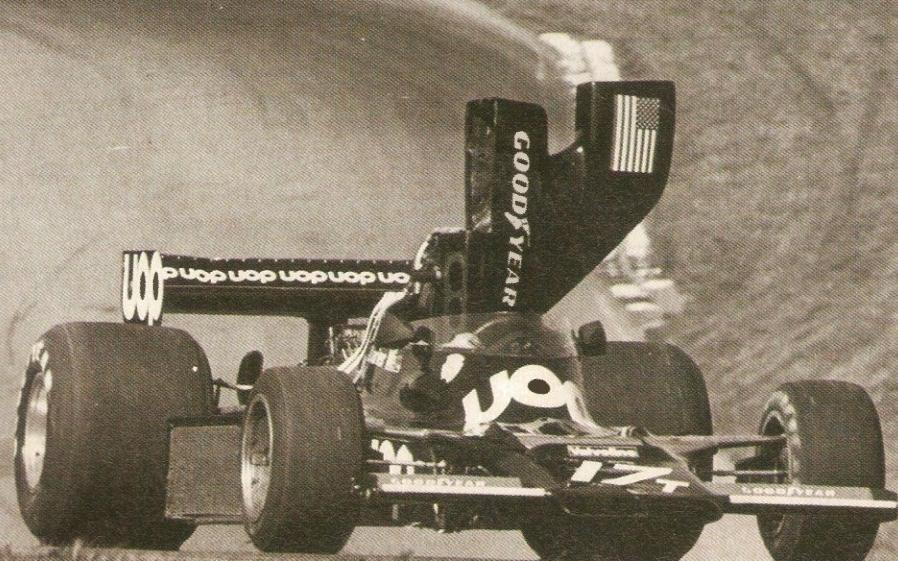
Clay Regazzoni won the supporting Formula 3 race, while Tony Lanfranchi won the British F3 race at Oulton Park.

■ 40 YEARS AGO

The racing season in the Northern Hemisphere was well and truly over, so we turned to South Africa for some motor racing action. Harry Pierce was particularly successful at the Central Transvaal Raceway (AUTOSPORT, November 15 1957). In the main handicap race over 65 miles, Pierce in his MG Special triumphed over Jimmy de Villiers, driving an ex-Lord Louth Jaguar D-type. One of the most unusual cars at the meeting was the Climax-engined Speedy Engineering Special, which was thought at the time to look somewhat like an Indycar. Using a bit of imagination...

Controversy raged over the previous weekend's Sports Car Grand Prix in Caracas. Race winner Peter Collins stressed that the drivers had only agreed to race on the circuit provided certain safety modifications were carried out. It transpired that they were not made, and the FIA was criticised for allowing the race to take place.

From the archives... Jean-Pierre Jarier's UOP Shadow DN3. The year? Well, it's 1974 or 1975. What's going on? Damned if we know. Over to you...



WAITING IN THE W

David Coulthard emerged a real force in '97, taking two wins. He mulls over his year with David Tremayne

Fid something there,' David Coulthard admits, almost sheepishly, as he recalls the Canadian Grand Prix, 'which I normally always try and avoid. And that's show too much emotion.' His McLaren was dominating the race, but the sensor in one of the clutch-operating paddles either side of the steering wheel failed during his one scheduled pitstop. Had he used the other paddle it would have been

okay, but there was no telemetry to advise that only one side wasn't working. Every time he tried to start, the clutch failed, and the win went out the window. Subsequently, team boss Ron Dennis advised him to stop again for tyres, even though he was happy enough with their wear rate, and that coincided with Olivier Panis's race-stopping accident. It was one of those days. And it marked an uncharacteristic outburst from a

man who tries so hard to maintain an even strain. He could be seen pounding the wheel during the drama.

'We were committed to one stop because we felt that was absolutely the thing to do. We were still feeling a bit sore from qualifying because we felt we could have been on pole position, but we'd had the engine blow on my race car and then we had a problem with the T-car. I wound up fifth on the grid, a couple of tenths off and thinking, "Shit".

'But it was so funny in the race because people kept peeling off into the pits and we were thinking, "Great, everyone's doing two stops."

And I was keeping up with them all! It then dawned on us it must have been quite annoying for all the other teams because I kept going lap after lap until the halfway point. And then it all went wrong. Disappointing.'

A pause, then: 'It gives an edge to your competitors if you show your emotions. In my kart career I never ever looked round, never shook my head or punched the steering wheel. I managed to get away with not doing those things for years, and suddenly, the stakes are so much higher in Formula 1 and if you lose the chance of a win, especially one like that, it's frustrating. I just lost it.'



INGS

"The stakes are much higher in F1, and if you lose the chance of a win, it's frustrating. I just lost it."

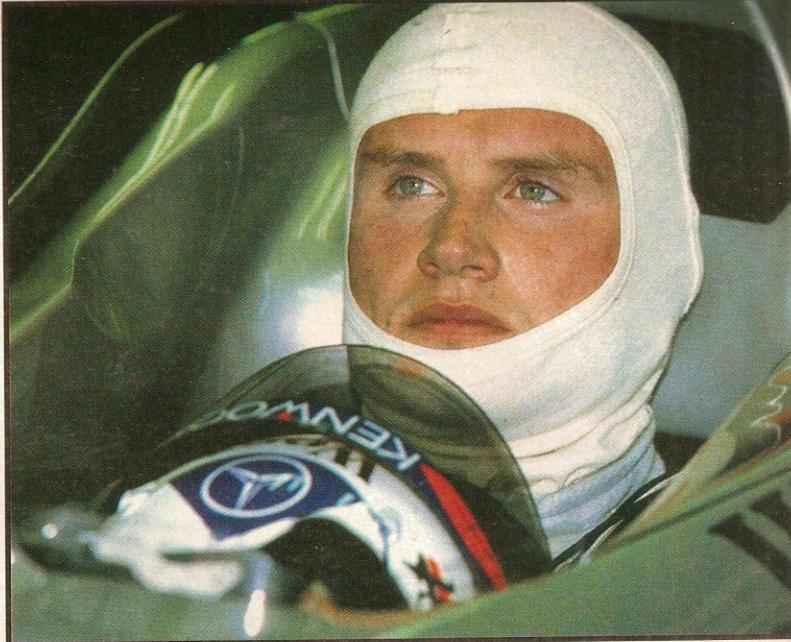
DAVID COULTHARD

'And that was the most frustrating point of the whole season. It was just a show of total and utter disbelief and frustration that we were giving away the 10 points. I wish I hadn't done that, but there you go.'

The season had started perfectly with victory in Melbourne, though Coulthard says it didn't change his expectations for what proved to be a year of peaks and troughs. 'We were better prepared than the others, and in Melbourne we were best of the rest,' he says. 'What surprised us was that at some of the tracks we thought we wouldn't be good at, we were. Like Barcelona. I qualified third there, which was a bit of a surprise because we weren't at all good there the year before.'

'It was good to get a win in the bank, but I didn't go away thinking we were going to win the title.'

Later Coulthard won at Monza, too, and what he described as 'a fantastic race' also provided him with the intense satisfaction of the season's best catch when the McLaren



To Coulthard, any sign of emotion in the cockpit is a sign of weakness. But sometimes...

so nearly got away from him in the Ascari chicane, his warm-up Nemesis two years ago. 'That to me sums up why that was one of my best drives, because normally I would have lost it and I didn't,' Coulthard insists. 'And the reason I didn't was the absolute desperation, commitment and belief that I could win. I just wasn't going to allow anything to get in the way of winning that race. I was just totally focused on that piece of track at that time.'

The result came after weeks of uncertainty when outsiders believed either he or team mate Mika Hakkinen was about to be unloaded from McLaren. In Hungary, in particular, he seemed uncharacteristically tetchy and defensive as the world pondered Ron Dennis's 'offer' to Damon Hill.

Coulthard said he was confident of staying at the time and says now: 'I was, but there's nothing like people asking you the same question over and over to destabilise or piss you off. If someone's always patting you on the back you can listen to that all day.'

But if someone's saying to you, 'Are you staying, what's happening?' and you're looking Ron (Mercedes motorsports boss) Norbert (Haug) in the eye, you trust them, they tell you you're okay and you walk away and think, 'Right, I believe in them.' Then you've got 50 people saying, 'Ooh', and other team owners who may want to tell you you're going to get screwed - it distracts you. So I did get a little edgy at that time. And little things begin to irritate you when you're in that situation.

I was at the Friday Five press interviews in Hungary and I told (interviewer) Bob Constanduros I was amazed by some of the questions he asks because they are very direct. I was thinking, 'If I can't be honest, if I cannot say just what I'm thinking, it's a pretty poor world, isn't it?' But F1 has developed into a world where you should either be controversial and give lots of nice lines to people, or not say anything! I'd like just to be able to say: 'This is the way it is'!

He describes his relationship with McLaren as 'comfortable,' ▶



What a start! DC kicked off the year with a win in Oz. Team mate Hakkinen was third



Brake problems cost an unlucky Coulthard, here chased by Mika Hakkinen, the chance of a win at the British GP at Silverstone

◀ and though he and Hakkinen are distant, he says: 'I think we've found our positions within the team, and he and I have certain strengths. Between ourselves we have pushed the team forward.'

It's all he'll say, but there have been tensions on more than one occasion as he, like Mark Blundell before him, has tried to come to terms with the special relationship between Dennis and the Finn.

The honours are relatively even: whenever the car oversteers and seems nervous, he doesn't fare as well as Mika, whereas at other times he is the one who's ahead. 'That's absolutely correct,' he admits, 'but I wouldn't say it's oversteer I don't like, because I tend to be quite quick in the wet compared to Mika, and also to Damon. I had pole in Argentina, for instance. In the wet a car will slide very progressively, and my driving style normally is quite smooth, so you can feel the car getting to that limit not too badly. But what I have a problem with, and it's been one of the difficulties with the McLaren for a couple of years, is that it's pitch-sensitive. It's been improved for this year, which is why I think my performances have improved as well, but basically when you brake it suddenly generates a lot more front downforce and as you try to turn into

"We've got absolutely every reason to believe we'll have the best car next year"

DAVID COULTHARD

the corner it just pitches and kicks the rear out. I find that very difficult to judge and to feel, and I don't know why. It's an area that's my weakness, but I'm working on it.'

He believes the arrival of design wizard Adrian Newey has helped McLaren a lot, 'but as I'm not in the aerodynamics department I'm not sure how much is him and how much is team effort. But we certainly had some aero changes towards the end of the year which Mika and I felt improved the car. We don't mind who did them, so long as it's a step forward!'

The perception in the paddock is that McLaren is poised for full resurgence, and Coulthard is optimistic. 'I think that the belief is, with what's been done on the engine and with Adrian and with all the engineers who are already there, that on paper we've got absolutely every reason to believe we will have the best car next year,' he says. 'It's whether you turn that belief into reality. But we've got all the ingredients. We've got the top engine, top designers, good drivers, budget. What should be missing? Williams has had that edge, now we are hopefully going to take it from them.'

Coulthard doesn't seem too concerned about the new regulations. 'I drove the modified '96 car. It wasn't that good a car anyway relative to the opposition, so just because you make it narrower doesn't really make it a babe. It just makes it a narrow version of what it was,' he remarks. 'The '97 car made narrower would have given a better indication. But it's obviously slower, because you are carrying more wing as you have less aerodynamic efficiency and you need the downforce in the corners. You're slower on the straights and traction is more difficult. The car slips and slides a lot more. In fact, it's getting closer to Formula Vauxhall-type handling characteristics.'



Past, present and future champs? Coulthard with Damon Hill (left) and Jacques Villeneuve

SPORTSIMAGES

The price of fame

Coulthard was not pleased when the press invaded his private life

Earlier in the season, David Coulthard came under the glare of the tabloid spotlight when his relationship with longtime girlfriend Andrea Murray ended in apparent acrimony. It was, he said, a bemusing taste of the sort of attention most people can do without.

'I coped in my own way, but it's difficult to step back from yourself and decide whether it was good or bad,' he says. 'But I guess people would think I coped with it badly. That's because I found it amazing

and really rude, an invasion of privacy. People would say, "Oh, that's the price of fame." But what I would say to them is that it's only people who haven't been in the public eye who would say that. Anyone in the public eye would suddenly think, "Hold on a minute, just because I'm in the public eye why should I have to have my private life investigated just if I decide to change girlfriends, or whatever?"

'After all, my situation was just one of probably a thousand that had happened that day, but just because I

was a sportsperson, suddenly there was an interest.'

Coulthard is still genuinely surprised as he recalls the situation.

'It's a difficult one because these are the sort of situations that are difficult to talk to people about, because how do you judge what is the price of being a sportsperson? I undoubtedly get the vast amounts of money that I'm paid,' he breaks off to laugh – 'because it's a public sport, the sponsors want exposure and you become a well-known face – but does that mean that just because you are paid a lot of money you deserve to have your

private life scrutinised?

'I don't know what the answer is, but it would appear that anyone who is in the public eye does get their every move looked at,' Coulthard adds. 'In '95 I was very open and happy to do interviews; I am more guarded and selective, and you do feel a wee bit hurt when all that (relationship affair) is dragged up and then you have to face your mother!'

'I hadn't really done anything wrong, and I was portrayed as if I was some sort of meanie, which I think is unfair, but, there you go, that's the price of fame.'



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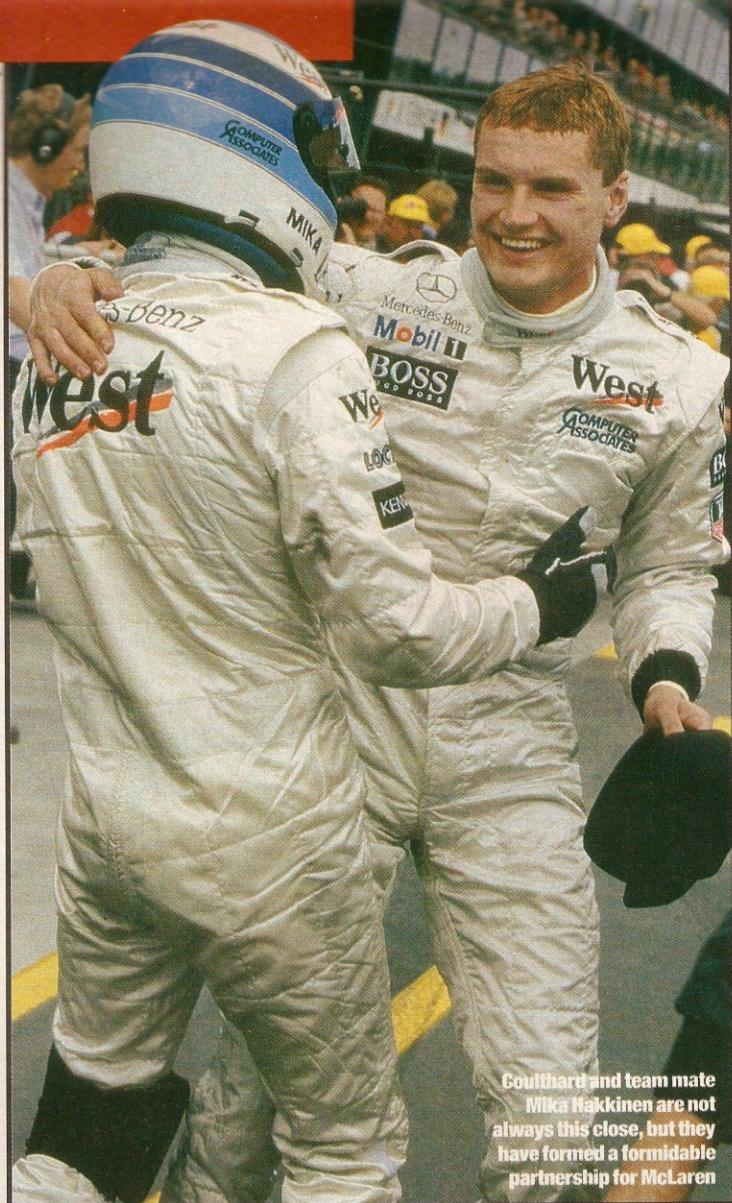
'As long as we've got a good car it won't really matter. The quick guys will still be at the front and the not-so-good guys will be back there.'

Ask him if he still enjoys F1, if it is still what he thought it was going to be when he was just an aspiring Formula 3 driver, and he gives a typically honest answer. 'This is always a difficult question to answer, because I never know,' he says. 'The truthful answer is not as much as I imagined I would. But the reason I say I don't know is that I don't want to give the people on the outside, who follow the sport and read this, the wrong impression.'

The only real interest to me is the racing. I find the technical side of the car and the developing work with the engineers interesting, but it isn't racing. I love to race. The only time I really feel me, and the only time I really feel alive, is when the red lights go out. And then I feel in control. Everything else I do in life, I feel a bit sort of, "Where do I go here, what do I do now?" In a race car I just feel very comfortable. It's the bits round about it, the politics, the appearances... It doesn't sit that comfortably with me, playing the mini-star.'

The sport's traditions and its ethics also mean a lot to Coulthard. 'It's very important for me to be correct on the race track,' he affirms strongly. 'I've demonstrated that I can race wheel-to-wheel with whoever. But it really disappoints me if somebody is overly-aggressive. I've never been in a position where a championship is at stake in F1. Maybe if that were the case I would be prepared to do something to win that championship if I believed it was right, but I don't think I could ever do something which I knew was wrong to win a race, and I wouldn't want to. I would much rather someone else won that race, rather than to have inherited it or to have taken it in circumstances that I know are not within the rules and sport.'

His last incident with anyone in the past three seasons came with Jean Alesi at Imola in 1995, when the mercurial Jean accused him of being the most incorrect driver he had ever encountered. 'I went to see him afterwards and of course he'd calmed down. When it's something



Coulthard and team mate Mika Häkkinen are not always this close, but they have formed a formidable partnership for McLaren

like that, when I really believe someone is being incorrect, then for some strange reason I suddenly feel very strong, a bit like Mike Tyson, and I would fight for what I believe in.' Fight, but not bite.

Next year he is ready for the most important fight of his career, and if he wins he would make a proper champion. But can he really do it?

'I think so, yeah. I really believe so,' he insists. 'If we can have the car that the Williams was this year, then either myself or Mika will be champion next season.' ■

I don't think I could ever do something which I knew was wrong to win a race

DAVID COULTHARD

Start me up

David Coulthard explains just how he's earned a reputation for being a super-quick starter

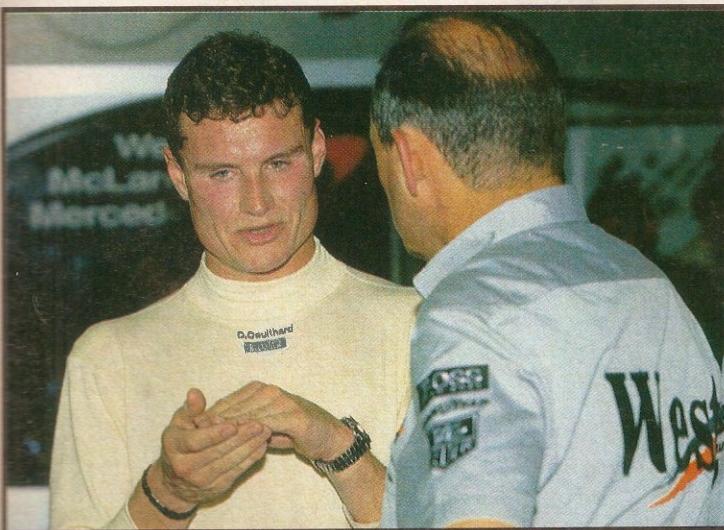
David Coulthard's super-quick starts have been something of a phenomena throughout his racing career, from his Vauxhall Lotus days right through Formula 3 and Formula 3000 and on to Formula 1. They have been so startling at times that it's tempting to wonder if he hasn't been a getaway driver in another life.

'Yeah, I've done a few bank jobs!' he grins. 'And since you've raised the subject, and because I've always been good at starting, I often get very frustrated when my old mate Jacques (Villeneuve) tried to leave things hanging in the press room as to why McLaren has been making good starts lately. As if he's suggesting there is something underhand technically.'

'There isn't,' Coulthard affirms. 'It's one of those things I'm good at, and therefore I don't want anyone to try and suggest it's anything other than my amazing talent to make starts! Of course there's nothing else there.'

So what is the secret? 'I never move the clutch from the stop before the lights go out. A lot of people sit there and hold it on the clutch bite point,' Coulthard explains. 'But I don't do any of that. I just sit there calmly watching the lights. I think it's the fact that I'm just so focused on the lights. And relaxed. That's all it is. I just blank everything else out. I mean, I can hear cars around me screaming at 16,000 rpm. It's quite off-putting, actually! I think it was in Hungary and I was idling ready for the start and all of a sudden a Ferrari beside me on the grid went "wheeeeh!" I thought: "God!"'

'It's amazing to listen to the way people around you try to do things,' Coulthard adds. 'My whole career I've made good starts, and it's just because I remain calm and relaxed. But the run down to the first corner – that is just one of those great moments!'



Coulthard and team boss Ron Dennis will be looking to oust Williams as top dog next year



Coulthard has forged a deserved reputation as perhaps the best off-the-line starter in F1

In the early hours of Monday October 27, newly-crowned World Champion Jacques Villeneuve was treated to a musical serenade by Eddie Irvine. Spain is perhaps not the best country in which to demonstrate one's shaky prowess with an acoustic guitar, but Eddie did his best.

'My playing has sort of stagnated around *Wonderwall*, *Wish You Were Here* and *Sunday Bloody Sunday*', admits Eddie, whose celebrity teachers have included Chris de Burgh, Chris Rea and U2's The Edge. 'With the amount of beers on board I'm not so sure I was hitting the right notes. Musicians say they play better when they're pissed, I always thought they just *thought* they played better when they were pissed. I didn't hear too many complaints, so maybe it's true...'

All in all, it was quite a memorable day for Jacques. He won't easily forget Eddie's musical contribution to his victory party, nor what happened on the track some 12 hours earlier.

'I felt there was always going to be an accident,' says Irvine. 'Not necessarily a deliberate accident, but if you've got two guys racing for the championship, and one's leading, do you think the guy in second is going to sit there? There was always going to be an accident, unless one guy had a far superior performance, which was

unlikely. Michael was the better driver, and Villeneuve had the better car. You had two equal packages.'

'It was just who was going to be blamed for it, that was going to be the issue. Whoever was second would have to make the move. How it looked, or how it was done, would determine who would get done for taking the other one off.'

Eddie's own season ended with a fifth place in Jerez, and he's generally happy with what he achieved in 1997.

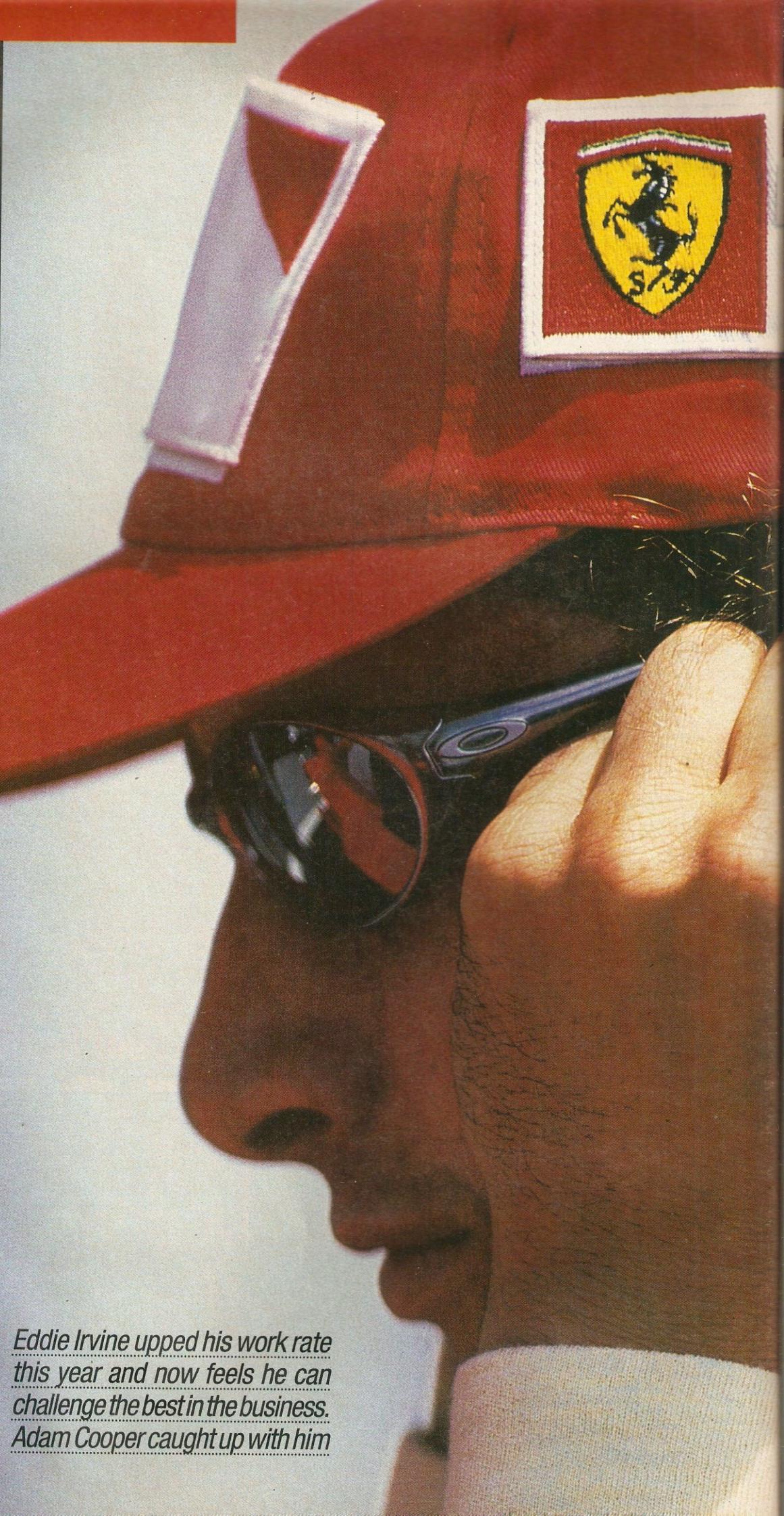
'I got five podiums, and my target was six at the start of the year. It wasn't as good as I would have liked, and it certainly wasn't as bad as it could have been, considering the Bridgestone situation. Teams were giving us trouble that really shouldn't have given us trouble, and there were races where we didn't have a chance of a podium, or even a chance of points.'

Consistency was hardly a problem unique to Ferrari, as all drivers sawed back and forth on the closely-packed grids.

'It is demoralising, but it happened to everyone, more or less. I went from 14th to third in one race, Nurburgring to Suzuka. Everyone put it down to my local knowledge, but that's a load of bullshit.'

Third at Suzuka was Eddie's best qualifying performance of the season, but it was not the only evidence that he was getting closer to his team mate.

'Last year I just couldn't get on



Eddie Irvine upped his work rate this year and now feels he can challenge the best in the business. Adam Cooper caught up with him

Sutton Images

Irvine: better, faster, closer

*Eddie
#6*

terms anywhere. He was just quicker - it looked like he was on softer tyres! Now we've sussed out what the problem was; we just had too much understeer all the time. I couldn't get rid of it because the rear was so snappy on last year's car. This year's car was a lot more stable. I kept on putting more and more front wing on, getting less understeer, and going faster and faster.

To be honest, I reckon but for a bit of his confidence in qualifying, there ain't too much between us now. I really felt as the year went on I was getting closer and closer. In the race at Hungary I really felt I could give him a run for his money. Alright, we both had tyre problems, but I had a faster lap in the race. I just feel I'm edging up on him, slowly but surely.

Eddie has rarely been awed by anyone, but Michael never fails to impress him. Does he think he's been out-psyched by Schumacher?

'Put it like this: there are a lot of guys in other teams who think they're the best driver in the world. And since they're not in the same car as him, they'll say it's the car. I can't say that, because I am in the same car! But I'm getting closer, and I intend to get closer again. And I'm a damn slight closer than anyone's ever been to him.'

'It's difficult because you're racing against the best in the world and he never has an off weekend. He's always there, he's always fast. But it's good for me because it's the ultimate challenge, and I get to see where he's so fast, and I get to work on my driving. I'm a faster driver now than I was, that's for sure.'

After two years, Eddie has got to know Michael pretty well. Away from the public eye, is he just a normal bloke? 'He'll never be normal, because he was a double World Champion at 26. The pressure, the hype - no one's going to be normal, are they? Alright, there is a bit of arrogance there, but I went out the other night and someone told me I was the most arrogant person they'd ever met in their life.' Would this critic be female, perchance?

'Yes...but we are all arrogant - it's just to whatever level I guess.'

How do Eddie and Michael get on? 'Very well. OK, he's not a mate, but he's someone that I think I can trust.' That trust is two-way. As time has gone by, so Michael has had more confidence in Eddie's decisions about the car.

'There's a couple of things he's tried this year, and hasn't liked, and I've tried them and liked them. He's then gone back and retried them, and it has been a benefit. So I've been very useful in that respect; I've had a few major inputs on development that Michael missed.'

Last year Eddie's big handicap was a lack of testing. The F310 was so troublesome that any available miles were given to Michael, and after kicking his heels for a fortnight, Eddie had to get reacquainted with his car at each race. This year testing has been more evenly split, and it made a big difference.

'Basically what it did was give me the opportunity to suss out where the problem was.'

The problem was understeer and getting rid of the thing, and recognising it quick enough. In Jerez I had it on my first three runs, I put a lot more wing on, and that next lap I was ahead of Michael - up to the point where I forgot to change the brake balance!

'It's just about keeping on top of the handling of the car and getting it right. Michael gets things together, you have to say, and I haven't been doing that as much as I would have liked. That's something I've got to work on. Over this winter I'm going to work harder than ever on fitness, be a lot more focused on the car, and just concentrate on the whole package.'

Eddie is confident that the new Ferrari is going to be worth the wait. 'Put it like this: working with Ross Brawn and Rory Byrne, the attention to detail on next year's car is phenomenal, I have to say. And you have to look at the figures; you have to look at our efficiency, our centre of gravity, our weight distribution. Between this year's car and last year's car we never made any steps forward. Between ▶

"I'm getting closer to Michael. I'm a damn sight closer than anyone's ever been to him"



Irvine has been happy playing a support role to Michael Schumacher's title bid at Ferrari



Irvine made great strides with the Ferrari F310B this year, but claims the step forward will be even greater with the 1998 car

◀ this year's car and next year's, we've made big steps forward.

While other top teams have been busy testing 1998 hybrids for months, Ferrari has seemingly paid scant attention to preparing for next year's rules, preferring instead to focus on the '97 title challenge. Eddie is one of the few drivers in the F1 field who has yet to sample grooved rubber, but he's not worried by the team's lack of testing knowledge.

'I don't think it will make any difference. All you've got to do is design the car the best you can; we know

what the priorities are once the track is narrowed. You bolt on the tyres, and away you go. Sure, you'll change springs and bars and bits and bobs. Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think that there's going to be that big a difference. We're just going to have less grip. At the end of the day it's like running on knackered tyres as opposed to new ones, and you'll just have to change the set-up a little bit.'

So, it will be easy to adapt?

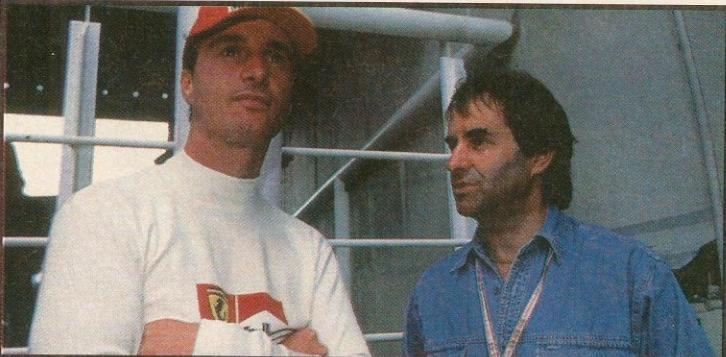
It's just like driving in the wet, or halfway between wet and dry. It doesn't take you 20 test sessions to get your car sorted for the wet.'

"Last year I had a great life. My races were st, but I was on the beach every day between races."**

Sutton



Eddie has had plenty of patriotic support



Off the track, Irvine has enlisted fellow Irishman Chris de Burgh as his guitar teacher

Sutton



A brush with Heinz-Harald Frentzen in the German GP left Irvine out of the running

Sutton

The wins that got away

Irvine was close to scoring a victory in Argentina and Japan this year, but the circumstances in each case were totally different...

The big problem in Argentina was that I'd had two bad races and everyone told me to take it easy, just get points. That's all I wanted, a few points. So when I was running third at the start it was just take it easy, no point to push, don't make mistakes. There was no way I was going to lose third. So I just plodded round, being careful, and that's what cost me the race.'

Villeneuve admits that his tyres were done, and didn't think he could hang on. Could Eddie have tried a little harder to get by?

'I couldn't have got past. I had the perfect tactics. I backed off a little bit, saved the tyres, took a run at him, and was right underneath his rear wing onto the straight. You couldn't have been closer. And he just pulled away from me! That was the big problem with the Ferrari this year; we were just too slow on the straights, and it made overtaking nearly impossible. There was no way I was overtaking Jacques unless I barged into him, which I wasn't prepared to do. A second is a damn sight better than a nothing.'

Six months later in Suzuka, Eddie did pass Jacques for the lead, although he knew he wouldn't be staying there for long. It's been universally accepted that his earlier pass of Hakkinen and Schumacher was part of some carefully pre-ordained plot, but he insists it was an opportunistic move.

'I said to Michael before the race "If Villeneuve is trying to hold you up, you



Irvine raced cautiously in Argentina

can probably overtake him on the outside of Turn 6," and he said, "it's not possible, it's very slippery out there". And I said "If I beat Villeneuve away, and he's behind you, and I want you to come past, overtake me at Turn 6. Then I can protect you into the next corner." There was no agreement that he was going to hold everyone up and let me through. Someone told me that he even backed off – I didn't notice it!'

Did Eddie enjoy those few laps of freedom out front, before the famous 'phone call'?

'I didn't, as I was just thinking about what to do. Before the race they told me "If Villeneuve and Michael are behind you, slow down and let the both of them past." And there's me pulling away from Villeneuve and Michael, thinking "What the f*** am I meant to do?!" I just thought I'd keep going until they call me.'

And what about the critics who are unimpressed by his willingness to help Michael?

'If they want to read my contract...'



Suzuka worked out well

Allsport

'A day here, a day there. I've just been back to Ireland after 10 weeks away. I've had my driveway done, and it's awesome! I really wanted to see how the finished job looked. The house is mega now.'

Never one to settle in one place, Eddie spends his time between his little hideaway near Dublin, and an even smaller flat in Milan, complete with sadly neglected goldfish pond on the balcony. Commuting between his two homes has been made easier by the jet he purchased in the summer. This time last year Eddie said he didn't want to avoid scheduled flights and thus miss the chance of bumping into the love of his life at Heathrow. So why the change of plan?

'Yeah, well, I was fed up standing in Terminal 3 waiting! Getting my own plane has made a big difference. For Magny-Cours, I had to get up at 5am in Ireland to get to the pre-race meeting on Thursday. In my own plane, I could have left at 10am.'

'It's just great to have it, except when I'm stacked over some shitty little airport and it's \$2000 an hour just to circle around! It costs an arm and a leg, but to be honest, I can afford it...' ■



Past and present... with Ferrari adviser and former champion with the team, Niki Lauda

So what can Eddie achieve next year? The answer is simple: 'Second in the World Championship, I hope.'

While most drivers are enjoying a leisurely November, Eddie is still flat out on Ferrari PR work. Last weekend he was doing a demonstration at Enna, and later this month he has to go to Venezuela on behalf of Shell – for a mere five days. So it goes on. Having been given the extra testing he wanted, it's been a busy season.

'It got a bit much this year, I have to say. Last year I had a great life. My races were shit, but I was on the beach every day between races. It was fantastic! I thought "This F1's great, apart from the results."

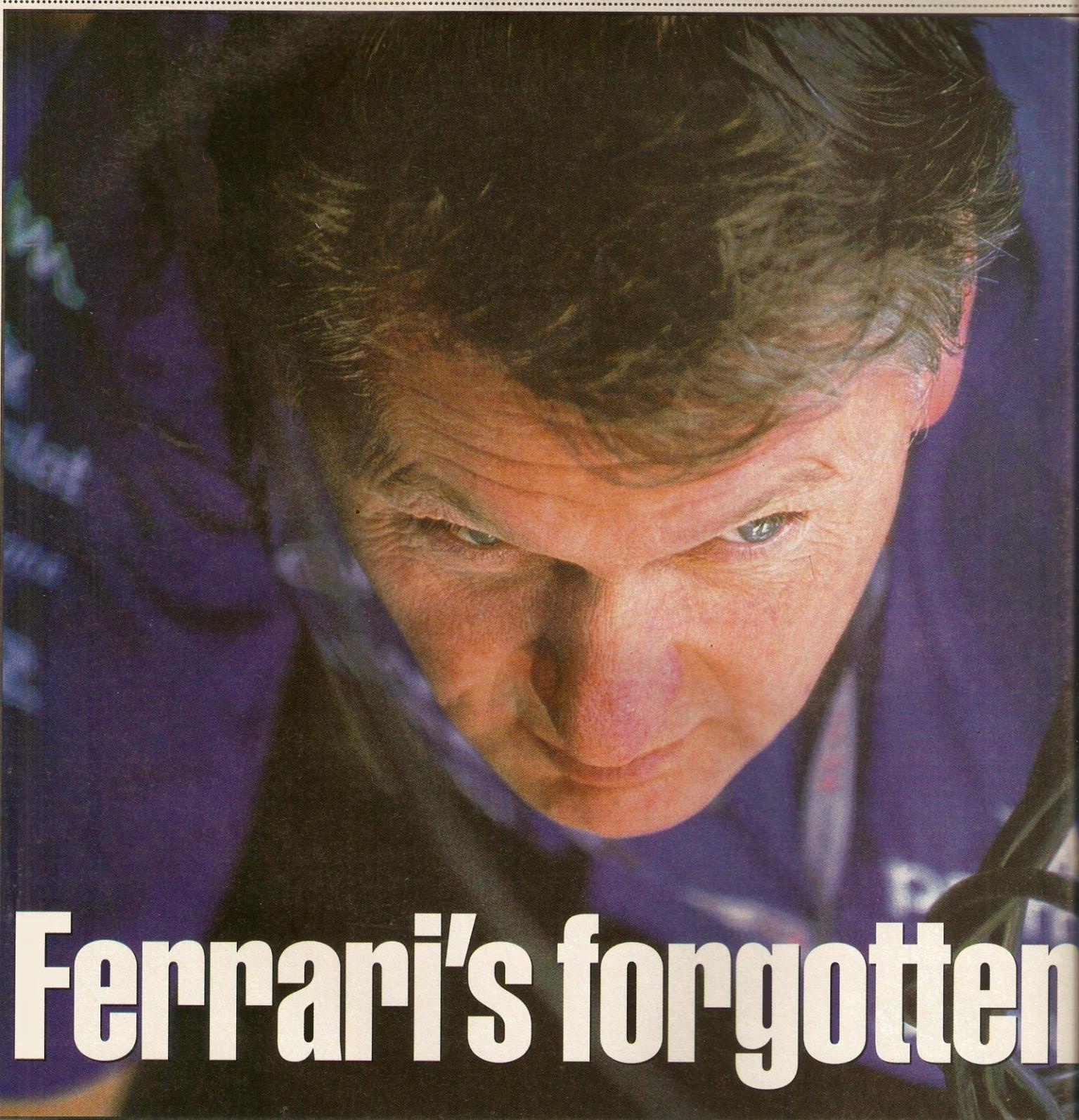
'It just shows you whenever you don't work hard, you don't get the results. It's simple isn't it? But there's no need for us to test quite so much. They want to reduce testing, so they say no testing in the week before a GP. So everyone tests all week, two weeks before the GP! The same teams always win, except we're spending a lot of money and going half a second quicker. With less testing, there'd be more chance of a surprise. Anyway, we don't get paid for testing, we get paid for racing.'

Has there been much time to relax?



AUTOSPORT

IT'S NOT JUST
FOR CHRISTMAS...



Ferrari's forgotten

Ex-Ferrari designer John Barnard talks to Giorgio Piola about his F310B, which almost took the '97 world title

To aim for the 1998 Championship we will need a car that is competitive from the very first race.' Michael Schumacher's words after his recent world title defeat sound like a poorly-veiled criticism of the last Ferrari designed under John Barnard, the F310B.

Yet the car penned by the softly-spoken Englishman, now resident at Arrows, chalked up five wins *en route* to a title showdown at the final race. That's not a bad record for an engineer who has had to deal with a lot of overt

criticism throughout the year.

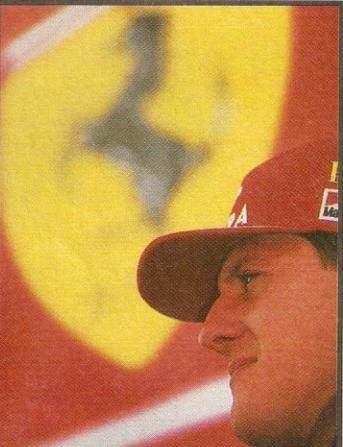
Barnard and Schumacher never really hit it off from the beginning, although this is disguised by the protestations of mutual respect between the two men.

'I don't think Michael wanted to drive a car the way I like to set it up,' says Barnard. 'It had been very difficult for me to work on a set-up of the car that he wanted, so I couldn't be bothered pushing the point any more. Having worked with Arrows, I'm positive the Ferrari could be set up very differently, but the driver has to want to do it.'

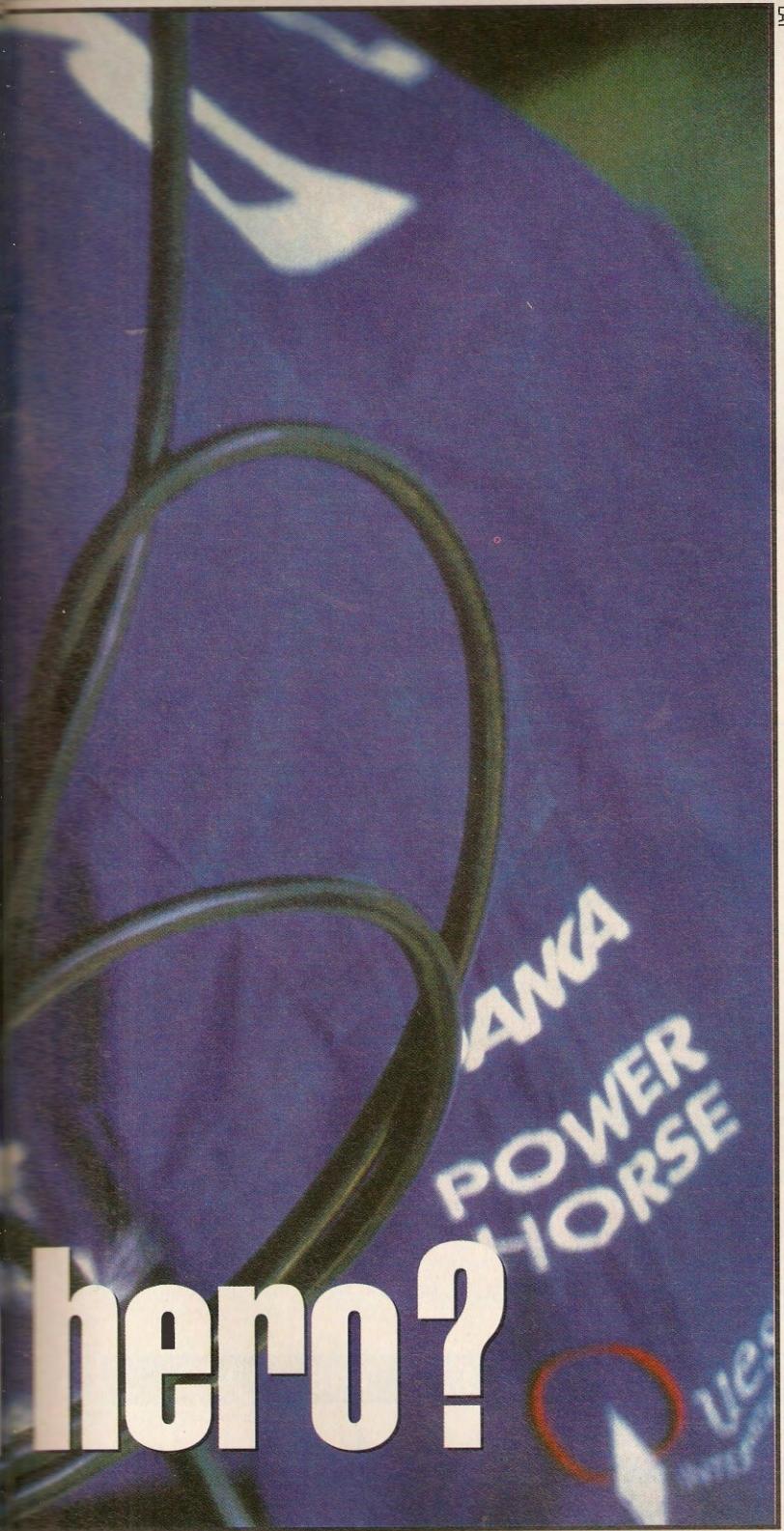
'In that situation,' he adds, 'I suppose you could have designed a car exclusively around Michael Schumacher, but that wasn't something that I had done. I was designing a car to do the best job possible, and I still think that it's a good car. Our starting point with the F310B was a good solid base. But you must remember it was built very quickly; it was ready by Christmas, which is good in some ways but bad in others.'

Because of that rapid gestation period, Barnard admits there are certain areas he would have liked to have spent more time on. 'For example, we had started a development programme with our aerodynamic front suspension which was put on ice shortly after we first made it. I

Allsport



Schuey and Barnard differed over set-up



hero?

don't know what they've done with it since then.

"The other thing is, of course, that when I designed the car and put the project to Maranello, it incorporated a completely new gearbox, which allowed us a notable weight advantage, amongst other things. Because of pressures of time and money, they told me that it would not be possible to make the new gearbox, so we laid the car out with the '96 one. That was a compromise, no question about it, which changed the weight distribution and affected other factors which I hadn't originally designed into the car. But the objective was to have a car which was immediately reliable and able to score points straight away."

So what was the main inspiration behind Barnard's 1997 Ferrari? 'The two objectives I wanted to fulfil with the car were to match the driveability of the 1995 version with a successful aerodynamic package,' he reflects. 'From the results of our wind-tunnel testing, I was happy. Given that in '96 we had suffered with traction at the start and out of slow corners, I shifted the weight a bit backwards. The problem then was the car went on the track and at that point I was no longer really involved in it.'

Which leads us to the question of how Ferrari could work efficiently when its designer was in Surrey and its team in Italy.

'I had always said, from the start, that I couldn't be Ferrari's overall

technical director,' argues Barnard. 'You can't run Maranello from England, so if you want to do something in England it has to be with a self-contained team. Our team has to be thinking about next year's car and working on new projects, but there has to be a technical director in Maranello working in harmony with the English satellite.'

'When I arrived at Ferrari, Harvey Postlethwaite was still there, and there was a meeting arranged after the 1992 British Grand Prix with Harvey, myself, Niki Lauda and Luca de Montezemolo. We sat down over dinner and discussed how we thought it could work. I don't want to get too drawn into this, but when I started, the situation had changed and I found myself with the job of overall technical director, which I simply could not do, working from England.'

As Schumacher rallied his ex-Benetton allies around him, with Ross Brawn as figurehead, it was clear Barnard's fall from grace was imminent.

'It's a thoughtfully designed car which pays a lot of attention to detail,' said Brawn, while criticisms

of the car's undersized fuel tank and lack of straight-line speed continued.

'I really don't understand that,' counters Barnard. 'We worked on the airbox a lot as that was a problem on the '96 car, because of the high shoulder protection at the edge of the cockpit. We took particular trouble to make sure we had a decent airbox pressure.'

'Having said that, I think the air box needed a modified inlet from a fairly early stage. Ferrari's made a new air inlet now, but I don't think they have done a particularly good job. I went a stage further with the airbox at Arrows and got some excellent results.'

'But to go back to the fundamental problem, I don't really know why the F310B is slow in a straight line. It's got to be either aerodynamics or engine. The sidepods were altered when the car only existed as a model in a wind-tunnel. We started off with something similar to what we had on the '95 car, and during the course of testing in Maranello, the definitive shape of the inlet evolved.'

'The car seemed to work par-

"The objective was to have a car which was able to score points straight away"

JOHN BARNARD



Barnard's twin objectives for the F310B were good driveability and aerodynamics

A Barnard-inspired moment: Damon Hill's Arrows grabs the lead of the Hungarian GP from the Ferrari of Michael Schumacher



ticularly well in simulated low-downforce configuration. The interesting thing is that it gave us a big improvement over the '96 car in terms of aerodynamic efficiency, which would show up in circuits like Hockenheim and Monza as straight-line speed, so I'm really quite surprised at any deficiency.

'You have to remember,' he adds, 'that from September '96 all ongoing aerodynamic development took place at Maranello, which was a bit of a last minute decision, so that meant it took some time for models to be built and so forth, which had obvious consequences for the development of the car.'

Williams gains an advantage in using smaller radiators than Ferrari, because Renault's V10 can operate at higher temperatures than most. This is a fact that had not escaped Barnard. 'I was already sending faxes to Maranello about engine running temperatures about two years ago,' he says. 'It's not so much a question of how big your radiators are, but more down to the amount of air flow you can put through them, and

therefore reduce drag against forward motion.'

Barnard's point of view regarding the so-called problem of the undersized fuel tanks is equally succinct. 'I don't think it's too small,' he shrugs, 'since it was the size that everybody had agreed it should be when I originally presented the design. Everybody had a chance to chip in.'

Temporary relief from the detractors of the F310B was provided by the lightweight chassis, which made its race debut in Spa after Schumacher damaged his lightweight race car for Hungary in the warm-up. 'Back in '95, we tried building a lightweight chassis. It was a big saving in terms of weight, but it also lost a lot of torsional stiffness, although it still passed the rather severe FIA crash test. I thought the benefit was exceeded by the problems caused by a lack of torsional rigidity, so we never used it.'

Like the man who designed it, the F310B is full of pragmatic and rational solutions. At the heart of the car's success in the wet/dry races at Spa and Monaco was its ability to easily

"Maybe one day they'll remember I was a part of Ferrari's history"

JOHN BARNARD

Barnard on Ferrari

swap from wet to dry set ups (see sidebar). And despite the criticisms often levelled against him, many of Barnard's other Ferrari innovations have been copied by rival teams, such as the torsion bar suspension introduced in 1989, the semi-automatic transmission fitted in the same car, and the electronic brake pump which allowed electronic control of braking.

Alas, the championship dream for Ferrari and its F310B, and ultimate exoneration for Barnard, finished in a Jerez gravel trap in the dying gasps of the season. But putting aside any regrets or misunderstandings at that race, if you looked closely at Barnard's wrist, you would have seen a Ferrari watch under the Englishman's shirt cuff: a small, simple gesture of support.

The memories of *Ferrarista* Alain Prost's fight against Ayrton Senna in 1990 and, above all, Nigel Mansell's incredible victory with the all-new 640 in Brazil will remain indelibly etched on Barnard's mind. Perhaps it is that which caused the usually reticent Englishman to comment wistfully on Italian television: 'When they talk about Ferrari's history, maybe one day they'll remember that I was a part of it...' ■



John Barnard switched to developing the Arrows-Yamaha A18 with Damon Hill

Technical focus

Flexibility, allowing an ease of set-up, was an important factor when Barnard designed the Ferrari F310B

Mechanics can easily change the set up of the F310B, and this flexibility has been crucial to the car's success.

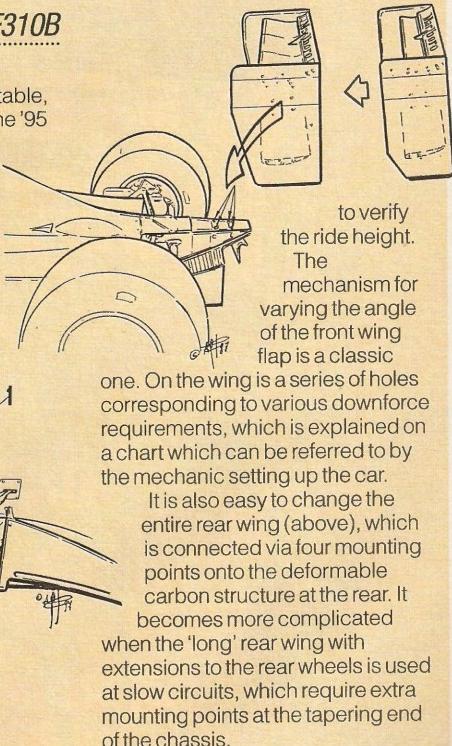
changed rapidly with no need to remove the shock absorbers to change the co-axial springs. The Ferrari is the only car to use the system at the rear as well. Whilst one

mechanic takes out the torsion bar, another can vary the ride height in less than five seconds (2) through a special cavity in the side of the chassis. The new torsion bars are in a box, while a fan (4) cools the motor.

Next, a mechanic inserts a new torsion bar, and the entire operation is concluded in less than two minutes when the bar is secured with a special spanner. This is similar to the system used on the '95 car, although the bars and anchoring mechanism were

different in those days.

The ride height is easily adjustable, using a mechanism based on the '95 car. It is controlled by the two struts which connect the suspension balancers to the chassis, but instead of being adjusted from the inside with a spanner, it can be adjusted with a screwdriver (below, 1), which operates an internal rack mechanism. The mechanics have a point of reference (2) on the chassis



to verify the ride height. The mechanism for varying the angle of the front wing flap is a classic one. On the wing is a series of holes corresponding to various downforce requirements, which is explained on a chart which can be referred to by the mechanic setting up the car.

It is also easy to change the entire rear wing (above), which is connected via four mounting points onto the deformable carbon structure at the rear. It becomes more complicated when the 'long' rear wing with extensions to the rear wheels is used at slow circuits, which require extra mounting points at the tapering end of the chassis.

In designing

the car, John Barnard continued to use torsion bars (above, 1) in place of springs, as was first seen in the 1989 Ferrari 640. This solution, since copied by Williams, Benetton and Sauber, allows the set-up to be

Carlos Sainz's World Rally Championship bid ended, quite literally, in tears at the start of the final day of API Rally Australia. At the time he was leading the event and a win, or at worst second, would have kept him in the hunt. Instead, he was left with nothing but a broken dream.

A few hours later, with a rescheduled air ticket in his pocket and bags hastily packed, Sainz had put the disappointment behind him and was already focused on the one thing that could salvage something from the season: victory on the Network Q RAC Rally.

Sainz is commonly held to be the best all-round sportsman in rallying and certainly one of the best, if not *the* best, all-round driver of his generation. But on wins alone he is currently second best to his Ford team mate Juha Kankkunen. A win in Cheltenham would bring him equal on wins, 21 each, and that's a very real prospect. The fact that such a success would deny Colin McRae his second title is irrelevant to Sainz.

The Spaniard is one of those dri-

"With the new engine for next year, the Ford Escort will be very competitive"

CARLOS SAINZ

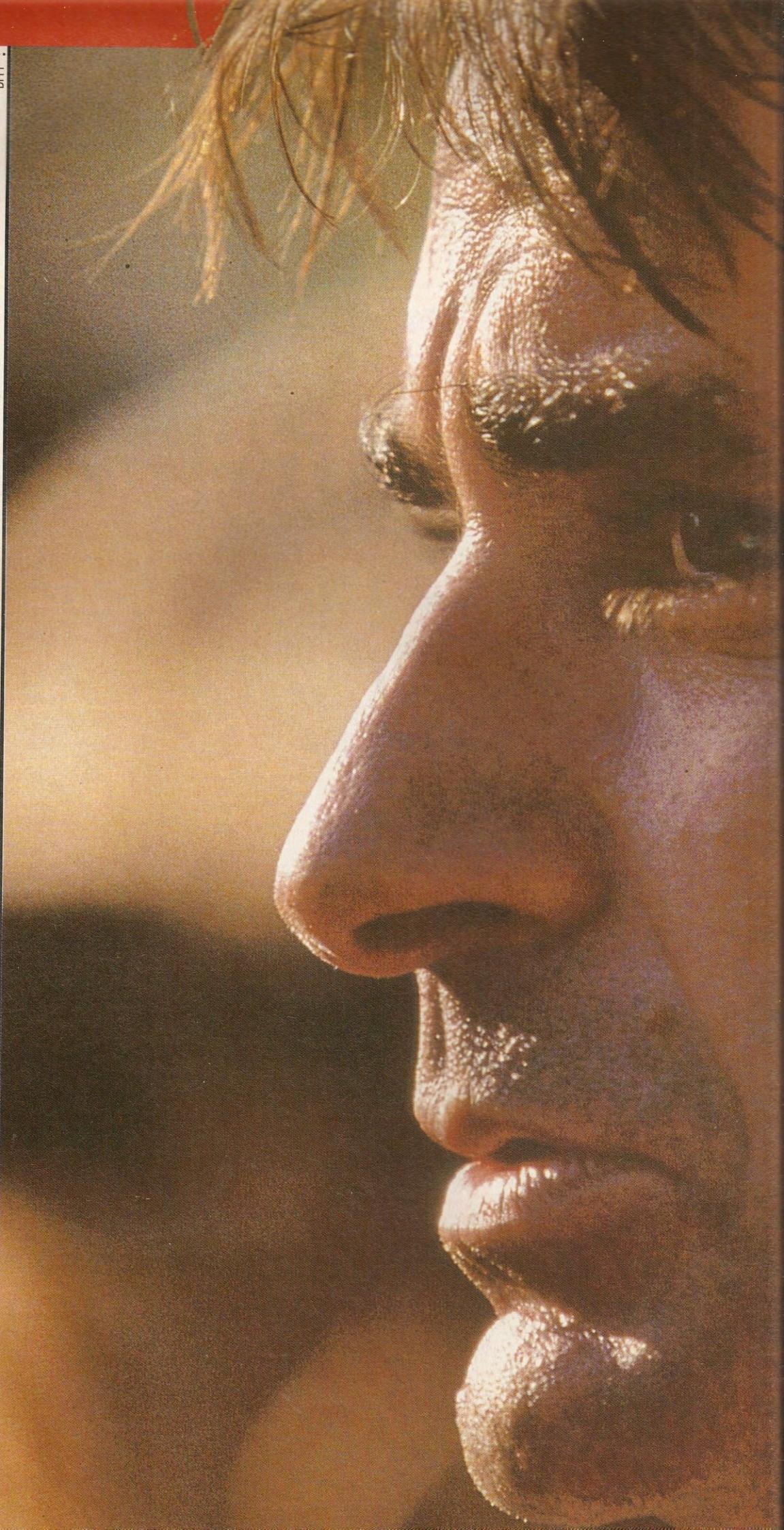
vers who can never be discounted for victory unless his time card is in shreds and the car on a trailer home. Only twice in the past decade has he not been in with a shout of the title at the decisive event, testimony not only to outright speed, but also to consistency. Yet fortune hasn't smiled too favourably on him in recent seasons.

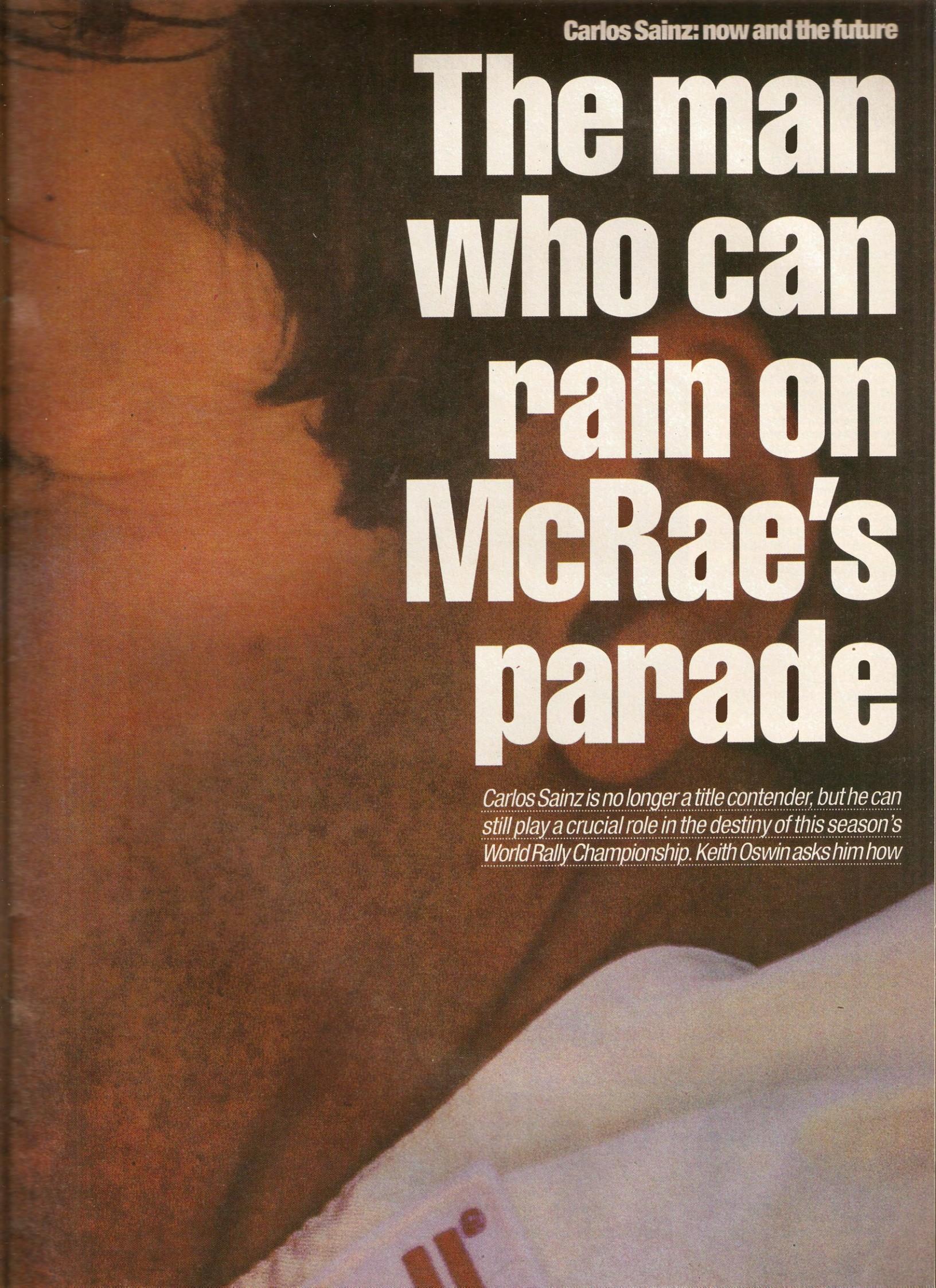
'I haven't been so lucky this year, nor for a few seasons,' he reflects. 'I think it's time that changed!' He was unlucky again in Australia because he could easily have finished well. Instead, a stone got into the engine and stopped the cam belt. End game.

When Sainz joined Ford at the start of 1996, it was in almost desperate circumstances. He had planned to be in a Toyota, but the FIA put paid to that option a week or two after he had burned his bridges at Subaru. Ford was his only option but, as usual, he moved seamlessly into a team in chaos and welded it into a serious contender.

'When I started with Ford I expected to take a year to settle everything and get everyone working in the same direction. In the second year we could then think about fighting for the championship.'

'Unfortunately, Ford made big changes at the end of the first year and instead of planning 1997 as we thought, I was again starting a "first" year with another new team. It was hard for us both and I'm sure that ▶'





Carlos Sainz: now and the future

The man who can rain on McRae's parade

Carlos Sainz is no longer a title contender, but he can still play a crucial role in the destiny of this season's World Rally Championship. Keith Oswin asks him how

Sainz On... 1

team orders and claiming World Championship crowns

Over the years Carlos Sainz has been both the victim and the benefactor of team orders, and he becomes extremely annoyed when people misjudge what is going on behind the scenes. However, the Spanish ace is not about to call for the end to this controversial practice.

'It's part of the game these days,' he admits. 'We have to live with it and understand the situation. When a result is decided because of team orders, I do not believe it right to say that either driver has lost. Piero (Liatti) didn't lose to Colin (McRae) in San Remo this year, nor was I losing to Colin in Catalunya in 1995 when he was ahead of me on the final morning. There is no point in pushing hard when you know there are orders in place for you to win. If you do that and make a mistake, maybe crash out of the event, then it is stupid.'

'I think no one really understands that and I think team managers have to make it clear to everyone what is happening so they understand the situation. After all, in a couple of years no-one will remember who was slowing down to help one driver – they will only remember the result.'

'The only thing that matters is the result of the rally and what it does for the championship position,' Sainz continues. 'That is why I was so disappointed in 1994 when I was trying to win the World Championship at the RAC Rally. I don't think Subaru gave me the support I should have had, they were only interested in Colin winning the rally. I think they learned from that and it is why the situation was different in Spain the following year, when the result meant that both Colin and I had a chance of the title when we got to the RAC.'

◀ we could have achieved much more if this had been our second year together. Both years I had a new team, new team manager, new mechanics and engineers and a new car. It took everyone a little time to settle down.'

Last year, the Escort Cosworth proved capable of good results, even a win, but not until Malcolm Wilson got his hands on the project for 1997 did the car finally show the form everyone believed it capable of. 'I think the Escort could be one of the fastest cars in the championship,' says Sainz. 'I have always felt that and I've seen nothing to change my mind. It lacks a bit of power, but I am sure that with the new engine for next year, the Escort will be very competitive. It's already quite a nicely balanced car.'

But Sainz won't be finding out how competitive the car is next year unless he's on the receiving end of a beating, for the Spaniard is jumping ship again and heading back to Toyota. And he hasn't even driven an Escort with the new engine yet. 'I



don't think I'll drive the car before I leave. I don't think Ford would mind me knowing what I am competing against next year, but I don't think it would be very fair of me to do that.'

Of his own performance this season, Sainz is happy. He says he can't recall any major mistakes and has been fighting for victory on most events. So why is he leaving?

'It was not a particular reason and it was certainly not an easy decision. Partly the reasons came from Toyota and the way it has approached the championship over the years, and partly from my long-term relationship with Toyota and Ove Andersson. I started my World Championship career proper with Toyota and won both my titles with them. The team was the first Japanese manufacturer to win a championship and it did it with me as well. I feel I am part of the family.'

He hasn't driven the Toyota yet and expects to begin his acquaintance with it after the RAC. He has seen the team carrying out its public testing in recent events and has seen



Matadors: Sainz and co-driver Luis Moya

Pascal Hilti
that he is getting the keys to a car that, currently, is fast but fragile. He believes that Toyota has gained immeasurably from contesting five events before the World Championship season starts in earnest and he predicts a busy winter break before he can start the Monte Carlo Rally with a chance of success. 'Maybe I won't have time to change things. If I'm happy at the start then it will be very good,' he says. 'It depends on the feeling I have when I first sit in the car. If I am confident, then why not fight for the championship from the start? I'm getting used to starting seasons with a new car!'

'It is important that I understand how a car works. I have learned a lot from good engineers like David Lapworth at Subaru and now Marc Ambrose at Ford. If you don't know how the car should work, then it takes a long time to change things you are not happy with.'

Sainz certainly feels that he has another title in him and clearly hopes that it will be achieved with



“People say I will retire in three years. Perhaps it will be three, maybe even one”

CARLOS SAINZ

the Cologne team. But he has a longer term aim for which Toyota could provide a crucial opportunity. For Sainz, at 35, is planning his retirement from driving and a move into management. Rumours suggest this will happen in three years' time, but Sainz won't be drawn on specifics.

“When people say I will retire in three years, I say that I don't know,” insists Sainz. “Perhaps it will be three, maybe even only one. It all depends on my motivation and competitive-

ness. If I find that next year I am slower than everyone else, then I might as well stay at home. At the moment I am sure that I have the motivation to continue driving at this level, but to talk about a specific number of years is not something I would like to do. At the moment, however, it is true that I have been talking about continuing for around three more years and then stopping. I will be 38 then and I know that you can look at Juha (Kankkunen) and Didier (Auriol), who are about that age and are still not slow, but who knows what I will eventually decide?”

So when Sainz finally swaps his crash helmet and overalls for a suit and a desk, what does he really plan to do? “This is also part of the reason that I moved to Toyota,” he reveals. “I have the option of continuing with the team after I stop driving. Don't forget that Ove Andersson is also thinking about his own future and so someone will have to take his place. Why should it not be me? I would be very happy to become manager of Toyota Team Europe. My life has



For 1998, Sainz will return to Toyota where he'll team up with French ace Didier Auriol

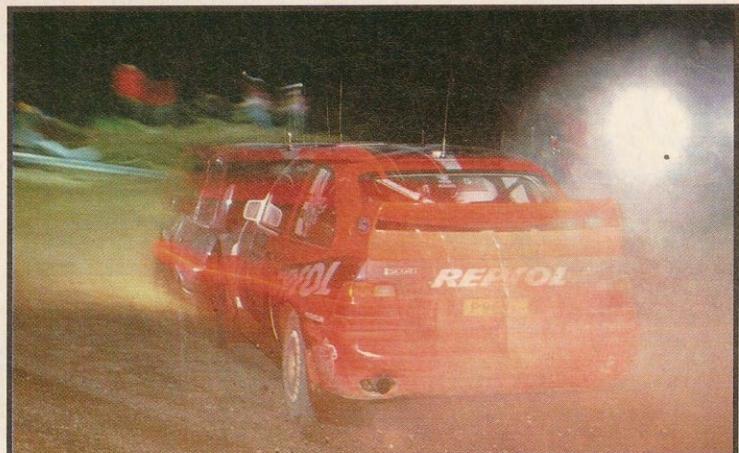
been rallying, so why should I break that link when I stop driving?”

But that may be three years ahead. Of more immediate interest is Sainz's plans for the Network Q RAC Rally. Just what does he expect from the series finale? “It is the first time in many years that I have come to the event not having to think about points or championships,” he admits. “I will go to the rally aiming to win, nothing less.”

That, of course, is typical of the man. But he is aware that his result could directly affect the outcome of

the championship. If he wins and is one place ahead of Colin McRae, then he will hand the title to Tommi Makinen. If he is ahead of the Mitsubishi and keeping Makinen out of the points, then he could be helping McRae. Does Sainz have any preference?

“I think I'm good friends with both of them and I don't think I will be trying to help either of them. They have the ability to make the result for themselves. However, if one of them sends me a bigger cheque than the other, who knows... ■



Pascal Huit

No world title for Sainz this year, but he's convinced the Ford will be super-quick in '98

Sainz On... 2

... a management role and his quest to find the next Carlos Sainz

It is a perennial question: does a team rate the drivers' or the manufacturers' title as the most important? Carlos Sainz is adamant that, when he becomes a team manager, he will concentrate on both.

“With the manufacturer, then I guess it is the manufacturers' title which is the most important,” he says. “But I have no doubt that, like in Formula 1, it is the drivers' title that is better known, more important and which is the true World Championship.”

“But you need to win both titles because winning the manufacturers' title will give you a lot of help with your employer for the following year!”

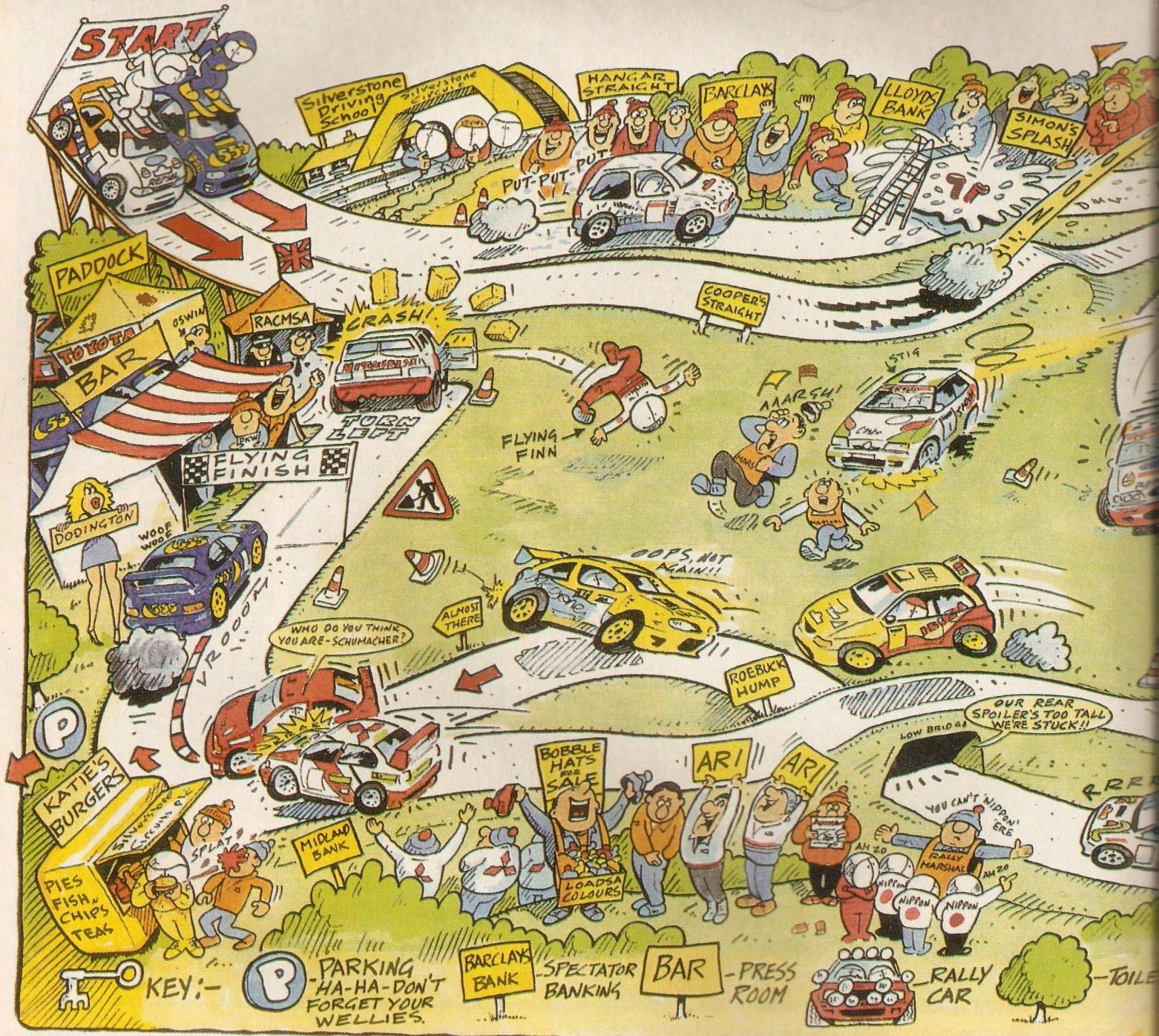
“I would hope that in the future, team managers would be in a position to enter (and count for points) three cars on the European rounds of the championship,” Sainz adds. “This is important so teams can find young up

and coming drivers to replace those who retire. I am working in Spain to find the next generation and we must do the same in every country. It is everyone's responsibility: drivers, team managers, manufacturers and even journalists. We must also campaign to make sure we do every event in no more than eight days if we are going to continue with a 14-round championship. At the moment the workload is far too much.”



Sainz fancies a job like Malcolm Wilson's

McKlein



THE HOME OF BRITISH RALLYING

Silverstone swaps Formula 1 for World Championship rallying on Sunday, November 23

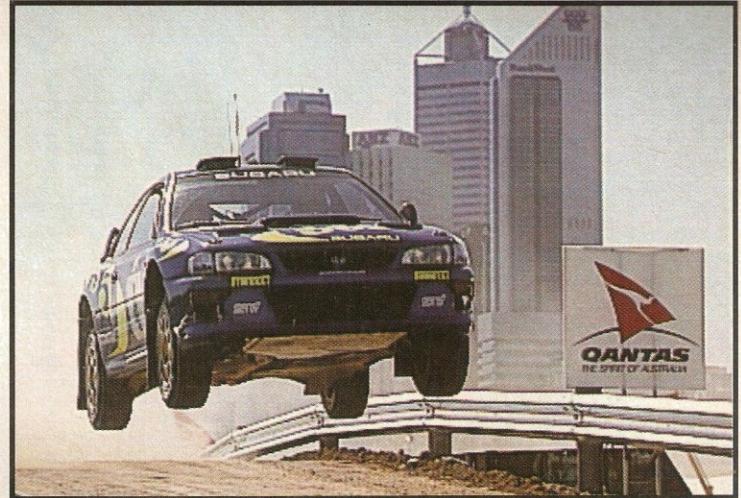
intense competition, then it's to rallying that you must turn. So when the Network Q RAC Rally blasts through the hallowed portals of the Northamptonshire circuit, that's the place to be on Sunday, November 23.

Makinen versus McRae, Sainz versus Eriksson, Kankkunen versus Burns, Auriol versus Liatti. That's the recipe served up and it's definitely one not to be missed.

Three stages are on offer during the day, leg one of the final round of this season's World Rally Championship, with Colin McRae needing outright victory if he is to take a second championship title and stop Tommi Makinen retaining his. No quarter will be asked or given, as this is a contest that will rage at a furious pace from the moment the cars leave the ramp at Cheltenham on Sunday morning to the minute the winner crosses the finish ramp back there next Tuesday evening.

On Sunday morning the rally aces will take on a traditional format stage using part of the famous Grand Prix circuit and part of the infield sections. A rally car, partly set up for the forest action that will follow in the subsequent two days, is a lively animal, prone to attacking corners at all angles and far more exciting than the roller-skates that are modern F1 cars.

But when the superstars return in the afternoon it will be to Britain's



Concentrating a number of stages in one location is used to good effect in Australia

first head-to-head superspecial, a specially constructed twin-track arena near the Becketts complex where the cars will compete over a sinuous track giving fans a unique opportunity to see the sport's greatest drivers rubbing door handles with each other as they race furiously side by side. By the way, it's now sold out.

Silverstone is undoubtedly the place to be for the opening day of the Network Q RAC Rally: it's a venue where the action will come thick and fast, whether you are watching

Makinen, McRae and Carlos Sainz or the club boys and girls at the back of the pack. It should be thrills and spills all the way and the action on offer serves to underline the circuit's claim to be the number one venue in Britain for top class motorsport.

The home of British Motor Racing will become the home of World Championship Rallying for the day and that's where both the hardened rally fan and the dyed-in-the-wool F1 buff should head for. There's no place quite like it. ■

How to get there

If you've got a ticket for Silverstone's inaugural superspecial, you're one of the lucky ones. If not, there's still plenty of Silverstone-based rallying action to savour on the 1997 Network Q RAC Rally

If you fancy getting down to Silverstone Circuit for the visit of the Network Q RAC Rally – and you really should – nothing could be simpler.

The inaugural superspecial is already sold out, but the stage based on the Grand Prix circuit itself (SS3 and SS4, kicking off at 1021 and

1034 on Sunday, November 23) is a spectacular mix of tarmac and gravel which should test the skills of the world's leading rally drivers to the full. For spectators, the viewing is excellent and plentiful.

Access to Silverstone is from the A43 only. From the north and east, use the M1, leaving at junction 15A,

then the A43 past Towcester to Silverstone village. From the west, use the A43 to Silverstone village. Follow signs to Silverstone Circuit.

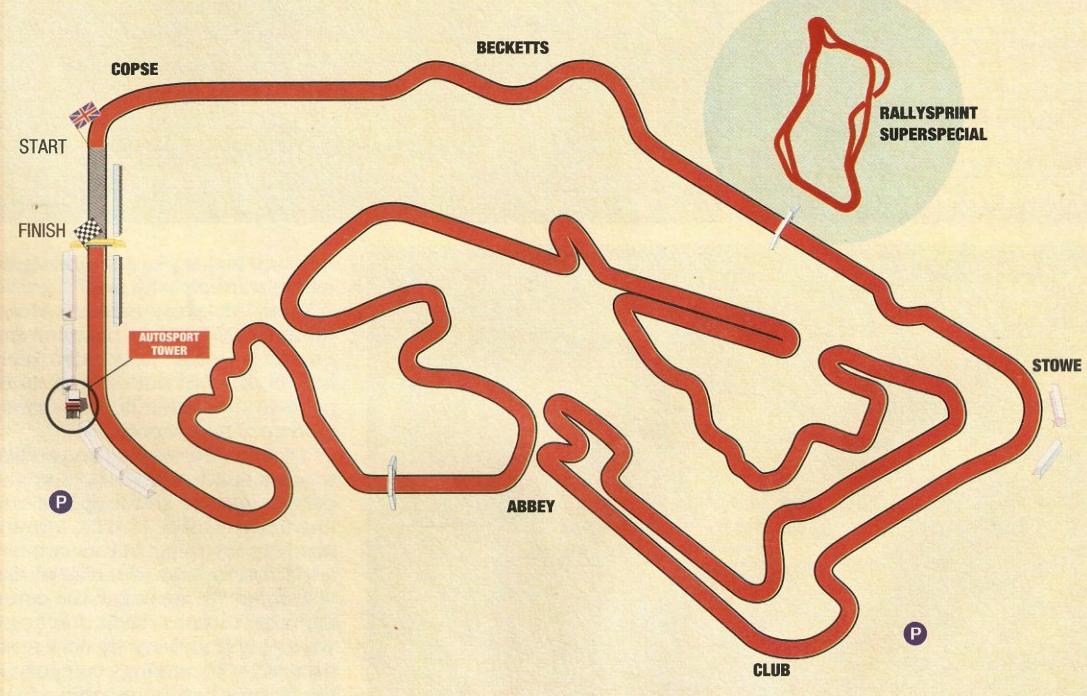
Ample free car parking is available in the North and West car parks. To save time, tickets can be obtained in advance from the Silverstone booking office (telephone 01327 857273).

A trio of stages, one on its new superspecial track, will be held at Silverstone. Keith Oswin looks ahead

Silverstone, the home of British Motor Racing. That's what the sign says at the gate and, of course, that's what Silverstone is famous for. The big event? The British Grand Prix, a weekend of high octane excitement and intrigue. Nothing else can match it.

Wrong! For with few exceptions, Grand Prix racing is a high-speed procession and races are decided in the pits, rather than by drivers going head-to-head on the race track, fighting for seconds all the way to the line.

If you want close finishes, a handful of seconds after three days of



t's a long time since exciting racing and the British Touring Car Championship have been anything more than nodding acquaintances; plenty of time to stew over why this is the case and what to do about it.

But it only took a split second for BTCC boss Alan Gow to shout 'Eureka' and make what he hopes will be the biggest breakthrough since the Archimedes Principle.

Actually, we're using a bit of poetic licence here. It wasn't while he was sitting in the bath that he thought, 'Compulsory pitstops are the key to exciting BTCC racing, make no mistake'. He was standing up - in the shower.

'Some of the best ideas happen in the strangest places,' he ponders. 'It was after one of the Grands Prix I watched on TV, and it was one of the few interesting GPs I'd seen this year. What made it interesting was the pit stops and I thought, "Hang on - let's look at the thing more laterally. Let's not try and reinvent the wheel, but let's apply the principles of any top line motorsport into the BTCC".'

So, for 1998, while race one at each meeting will be a flat-out sprint, shorter than the 50-mile races we have become used to, the second will be a longer, 60-70-mile event featuring that frenzied pitstop action where the teams must change two wheels.

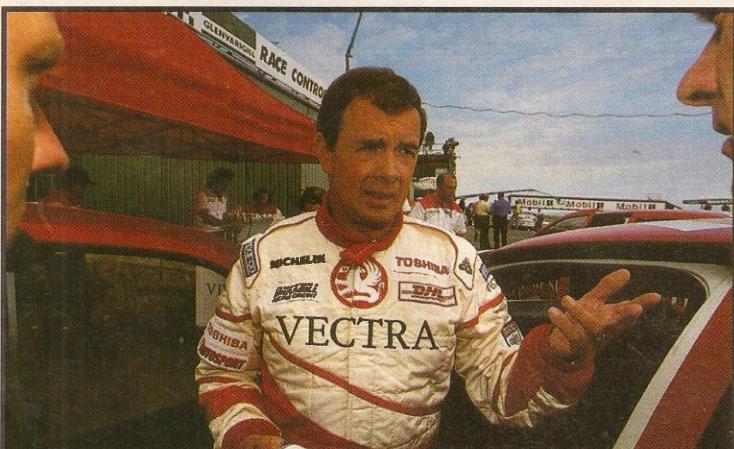
But will it turn out to be one of Gow's best ideas? To use *Beavis and Butthead* terminology, this writer thinks pitstops suck, and has hated them becoming an accepted part of Formula 1. Why should 90 minutes of a driver's hard work on the track play less part in the result of a race than 20 seconds stationary in the pits? I don't like the idea of them in the BTCC either. I'm sure I'm not the only sceptic, but I'm damned if I can

The best car and driver has to win. Now they just have to work harder for it

ALAN GOW, BTCC SUPREMO

A stop to the problem?

Pit stops and single-lap qualifying should pep up the BTCC in '98. Marcus Simmons gauges opinion



Vauxhall star John Cleland fully supports the new rules: 'The formula needed something'

find any major players who agree wholeheartedly with me.

Even Vauxhall veteran John Cleland, 1995 BTCC Champion and a man who speaks his mind so freely he'd be thrown out of the Labour party in five seconds, has warmly embraced the proposal.

'I think it's very good and I'd like to commend Alan Gow and the people who dreamt it up,' he says uncontroversially. 'I felt the formula needed something, but success ballast or reverse grids are artificial, like wrestling. We are still in the entertainment business and I don't care what people say - we are not a purebred latest technology category. If the people get bored they don't watch it, and if they don't watch it

we don't get paid, and if we don't get paid we don't do it. Simple as that.'

Gow admits: 'If there's anything we're guilty of, it's sitting back and hoping like hell that next year's on-track action will be better than the last. The simple fact is it hasn't been for the last couple of years.'

The BTCC's manufacturers advocated the idea of success ballast, whereby any car finishing first, second or third in a race would carry extra weight in the next. But, theoretically, even that would make no difference to the standard of racing - all it would do is open up the fight for the championship, something you only see on paper when the scores are totted up after each race.

'That was the only idea they came



up with as a group,' Gow recalls. 'We discussed it and I told them my views on it, and then they said, "Have you got a better idea?" And I said, "I think I have actually, how about this one?" I was always mindful of not wanting to turn the thing into a circus, and to maintain its image as an important and serious motorsport event, so you can't start putting in contrived or manufactured grids. The best car and driver has to win, but now they just have to work harder for it.'

Williams Renault Laguna star Jason Plato, a man who has fairly free access to the best car, agrees: 'It's great, because the TV can get involved with the pitstops and the leaderboard will change a little bit. It brings the team into it. Rather than

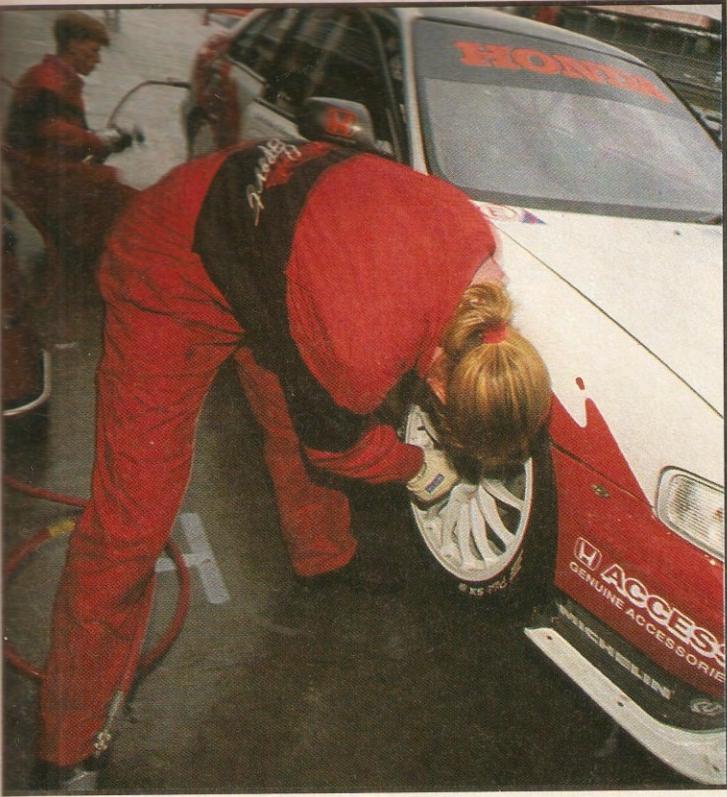
preparing a great car and then just saying, "Right, it's over to you, Jase," it gets everybody involved and provides a challenge to work differently.'

But how about the potential risk of losing hard-earned places in a shoddy pitstop? 'That's true, but it's the same as in F1. If anyone makes a cock-up at a pitstop it's seen. Normally if anyone (other than the driver) makes a cock-up it isn't seen, but the end result is the same. It makes no difference - I can't win without good people behind me.'

Cleland, too, likes the idea of the team getting involved: 'Starting at the back of the grid is not the way to do it - you could end up losing a front-runner because of some clown not looking in his mirrors. But to ▶



From next season, the BTCC pitlane and team crews will enjoy far greater TV exposure



Crews will have to hone their tyre-changing skills – and ensure that wheels don't fall off!

do it in such a way that involves the whole team is good, so that team managers have to think rather than stand on the pit wall doing nothing.

'Strategy will be an absolute element to the race. You'll have to decide, if you're coming up behind a train of cars, whether to come into the pits and lob some tyres on. The driver is going to have to think, and for some of the drivers out there that can be a real problem...'

'And I'll tell you what, drivers will have to watch their speed limits in the pits, because I can see TOCA's

"The driver is going to have to think, and for some that can be a real problem..."

JOHN CLELAND



Part one of a race may be like this – after the pit stops, though, it could all be very different

Malcolm Griffiths/LAT

Christmas fund swelling considerably in the next year!'

The strategists, the BTCC's team bosses, have welcomed the idea, too. Audi Sport UK team manager John Wickham says: 'It does add a slight element of unpredictability.'

But will the stops make much difference to a team logically? 'Not that much. We'll have to get to understand how the tyres wear in relation to the pitstop window (which will be between 15 and 75% of the race distance), but it's not as difficult as F1, where you've got two or three stops – we've only got to go for the tyre changes.'

'It's a good thing, even if one or two things have to be clarified. We still don't know whether there'll be any extra cost involved in what we can do to the car.'

Teams like Audi and Williams expect to have few problems with quick wheel changes, which the latter's team manager Didier Debae reckons should take six to eight seconds, but how about some of the smaller teams? Could there be a few cases of wheels coming off?

Gow thinks not: 'Look at Thruxton this year (a wet/dry race during which several teams changed tyres). The pit stops were shambolic,

BTCC's new rules

On your marks...

One-lap shoot-outs should add spice to the qualifying sessions



Class 1 benefited from shoot-outs

Pitstops aren't the only new dish on the BTCC menu in 1998. Single-lap qualifying shoot-outs, where cars appear in reverse order of the positions they reach in an earlier, conventional half-hour session, are going to form the grid for one of the two races at each meeting.

It's a method which has been tried and trusted on the ovals of the US, but in Europe has only been taken on effectively in the Class 1 International and German Touring Car championships.

It's part and parcel of the Bathurst 1000 in Australia, too, in which Super Tourers raced for the first time last month. Around the 3.8-mile Mount Panorama track, it was entertaining and provided a real frisson of excitement.

Jason Plato, a man who had to look on frustratingly at Bathurst while team mate Alain Menu qualified the Williams Renault Laguna, can't wait: 'I'm really keen for it. It will change the grid because people will make small errors. It's a bit of action, a bit of drama – a good way of spicing it up a bit.'

But he does sound a note of caution. Front-wheel drive cars take a while to heat their rear tyres, and that could cause problems when a driver is pressing on for a quick time after just one warm-up lap around the short British circuits. 'We don't want tyre warmers because they're stupid,' says Plato, 'but we've got to have two laps to warm up on some tracks otherwise we'll have people aiming off into the wall.'

Vauxhall's John Cleland disagrees: 'The cost of tyre warmers is a round of drinks in the overall scheme of things. The manufacturers were wrong not to want them, and I think the drivers should be asked about anything relating to their own safety. Since the driver is the highest-paid element of the team, he should be involved in the discussion, especially as he's the only one who knows how quickly he can get heat into the tyres.'

But will it stop Menu putting his Renault on pole so often? Alan Gow thinks so: 'I can't believe that good as he is, even Alain's a perfect job every time.'

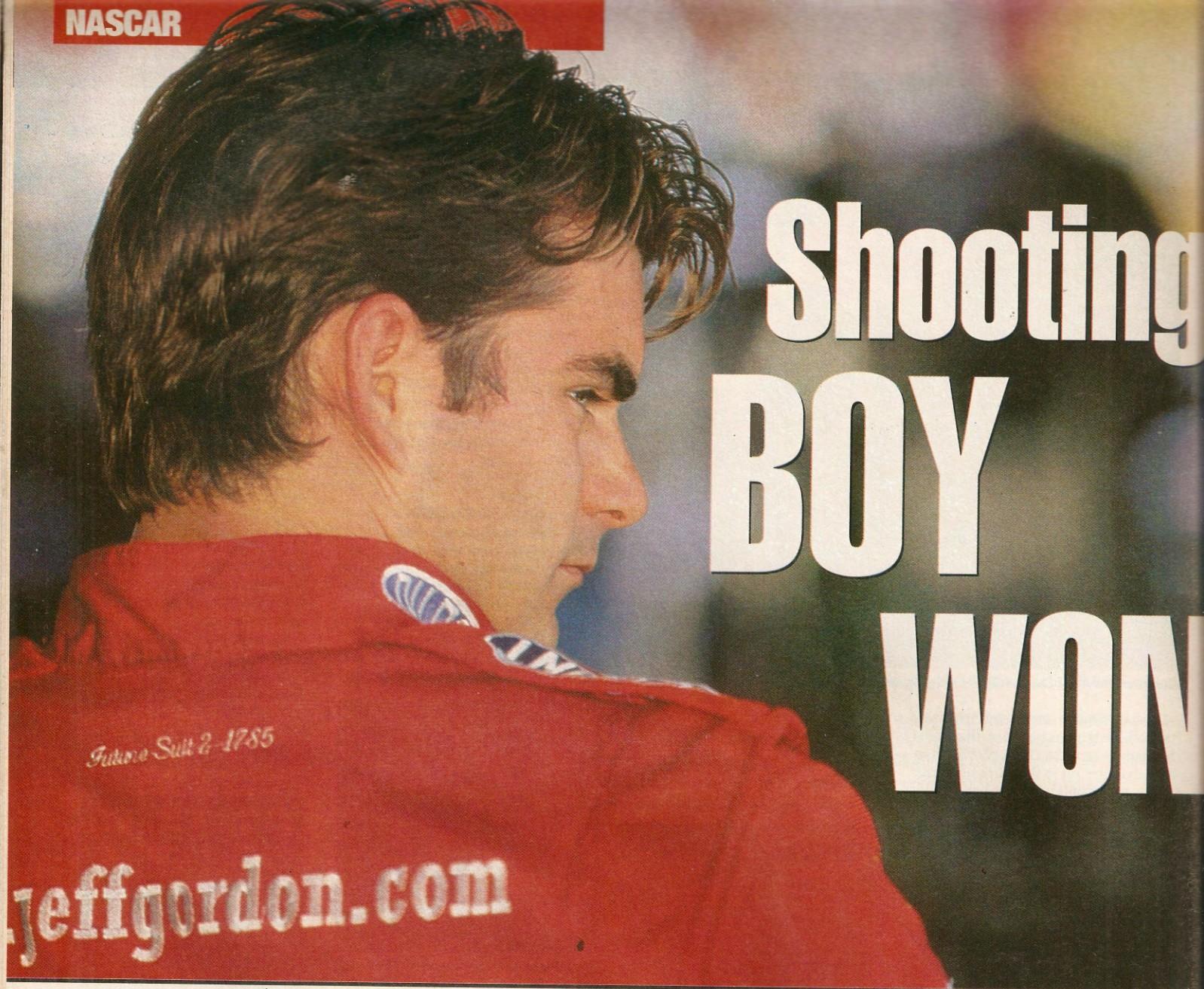
I but I didn't see any wheels falling off. They'll refine it. I'd like to think we're dealing with professional teams.'

But aren't we still relying on teams to make a mistake at pitstops to change the order and potentially provide the overtaking we crave? Gow thinks not: 'No one makes the same pit stops. What you need is just for one team to make a second up on the others.'

'Another thing is drivers won't have to nurse their tyres anymore. They'll effectively be giving their tyres two short races, so they have to go like blazes before and after and they can root their tyres, because they only have to go half-distance.'

Sounds good, but I can't help thinking drivers will follow each other around in order before their pitstops, and then chase round again in a slightly different order afterwards. After all, didn't it take 22 laps for Alain Menu's jewel of a Renault to get past Paul Radisich's still developing Ford at Brands Hatch in September? Many drivers argue the big thing stopping overtaking isn't the development of aerodynamics and brakes, but over-harsh penalties when their moves end in contact. In other words, they are punished for trying to provide the entertainment.

But what the heck do I know? I just hope I'm wrong. ■



Shooting BOY WON

jeffgordon.com

It's NASCAR showdown time again, with Boy Wonder Jeff Gordon the driver to beat. Connell Sanders reports

Your average American didn't give a hoot whether that fancy-pants Canadian Jacques Villeneuve beat the German guy to the Formula 1 World Championship. Heck, you're average American probably doesn't even know who Jacques Villeneuve is. It's

borderline whether they've even heard of Alessandro Zanardi. For the majority of Americans (and the minority, too, if you're south of the Mason-Dixon Line), there is only one form of racing, and that's NASCAR.

In the south-east of the USA, NASCAR stock car racing isn't so much a sport as a religion, and this

Sunday, the Atlanta Motor Speedway will host one of its high and holy days. It's the championship shoot-out, a three-way head-to-head at the 32nd and last race of the blue riband Winston Cup slogathon, when Georgia's shrine to all-American V8 heavy metal thunder sees Jeff Gordon, Dale Jarrett and Mark Martin slug it out for the title.

In a sport where taking it to the finale is the norm, not the exception, many have still been surprised that it's gone all the way this time. From

winning the season-opening Daytona 500 in February, through another nine victories for the one they call Boy Wonder, Gordon appeared to have his name already etched on the Winston Cup. But here we are, with Jarrett just 77 points behind Gordon, Martin another 10 back, and a maximum of 185 up for grabs in Atlanta. To be guaranteed a second title to add to the one he took in 1994, Gordon must still finish 18th or higher in the 43-car field. It ain't over, as they say, until the fat Bubba sings.



Martin (front) leads the Boy Wonder. Martin is the long-shot in the shoot-out



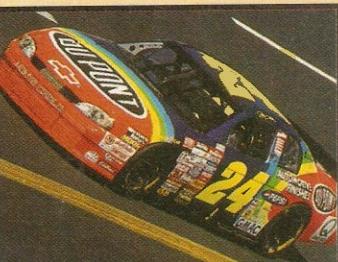
The quiet man... Dale Jarrett has sneaked up on the previously dominant Jeff Gordon

Setting the pace

A new track surface at Atlanta has sent lap speeds soaring

With Sunday's NASCAR Winston Cup title shoot-out at Atlanta, one thing's for certain - the race is going to be fast. Darn fast.

Between the first 1997 Winston Cup round in March and Sunday's season-ending NAPA 500, the Atlanta Motor Speedway has been given a huge make-over: the backstretch has become the frontstretch, a dog-leg has put the track length up from 1.522 miles to 1.54, and the pits have been swapped to the new frontstretch. But most importantly, a complete resurfacing has made average lap speeds shoot up to the point where Atlanta is now possibly the fastest speedway on the whole calendar.



Gordon loves fast tracks like Atlanta

Sure, the superspeedways at Daytona and Talladega are potentially faster, but the Winston Cup cars run power-deflating restrictor plates on those two tracks. For Atlanta, however, the cars are still given their head, with 750bhp of V8 muscle propelling them around at expected average qualifying speeds of over 196mph. In recent testing, that figure has already been approached, and with the new surface giving reduced tyre wear, the cars are also able to run faster for longer.

With the magic 200mph figure a definite no-no in NASCAR circles, for track insurance if nothing else, the alarm bells are ringing in some quarters. Is Atlanta just too fast? Should it join the restrictor plate tracks? The drivers seem to think not.

Of the three title-contenders, all have won on superspeedways this season, and all love the challenge and the inch-perfect accuracy needed on the Winston Cup's fast tracks.

'We know it's fast,' says Dale Jarrett, 'but it has a lot of grip, so the track is going to be fine unless something happens. If you run over something and cut a tyre, you are going to hit hard. But I might drive out of here and get hit at 60mph. Live it one day at a time, and when Atlanta gets here, we'll handle it.'

Rusty Wallace, the 1989 champion, adds: 'Big deal about how fast it is! It's fast because it's so smooth and comfortable to run that fast. Nobody should be complaining. Five miles an hour faster? Heck, I can walk five miles an hour.'



ATLANTA USA

Dale Jarrett's Atlanta form and current hot streak could give him an edge on Sunday

mere consistency. In Gordon's own words, he and the team 'refuse to lose'. By adopting that philosophy, by not being afraid to experiment on set-up, and by having the best driver in the business behind the wheel, Gordon and his ever-present crew chief and mentor Ray Evernham have conquered the rest and conquered the Chevy.

'I've been saying all year long that it's coming right down to Atlanta,' Gordon smiles. 'Finishing 18th sounds like nothing, but we're battling with a couple of guys who are running really good right now. It's easy to say all we'll do is go out there and keep our eyes on those guys, but it's easier said than done. The guy who has problems is the guy who's going to lose.'

Ah, problems... Like the two flat tyres he has suffered in the last three races, including last time out at Phoenix, when Jarrett won despite worries over fuel mileage. Without those problems, maybe it would have been cut and dry for Gordon by now?

Jarrett is liked well enough by the Winston Cup fans, but he's not a superstar in the mould of a Gordon or a Dale Earnhardt. His Phoenix win put him on seven for the season, and without setting the world on fire, his Robert Yates Racing T-Bird has been there all season. Softly, softly catches monkey.

'Nobody has told us that we can't win this championship,' he says, 'and anyway, we wouldn't listen to them if they did. We've got a chance, and we've just got to go all-out for the win. Jeff knows he can't go out there just for a finish - he's got a fight on.'

And if past form at Atlanta is a guide, maybe Gordon will be sweating a little bit when he reads the stats. In the last five autumn races, Gordon has averaged just 22nd. And the last time the good ol' boys raced there, back in March, Jarrett finished first, with the Boy Wonder a rather pitiful 42nd...

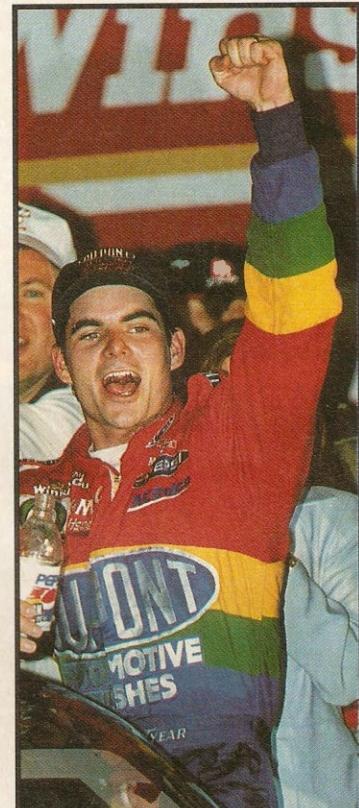
But as they say, there are lies, damn lies and statistics. In the end, with Atlanta running super-quick (see panel), it may just boil down to Chevy or Ford sheet metal making the difference. Looking at recent races, the ball appears to be in the Blue Oval's court, which sways it to

Jarrett - oh, and that man Martin.

Of the three, Martin is the enigma. His Roush racing T-Bird has been thereabouts, but it's on and off the boil from week to week. The Arkansas man has notched four wins, but has the most to do. He was bridesmaid to Earnhardt in 1990 and again in '94, and logic says he's more likely to make it a hat-trick than finally land the big one.

'The race will be on,' he shrugs, 'but it sure would be better if we were out in front in those points.'

Well sure it would, Mark, but that champion's parking slot has Jeff Gordon's name of on it at the minute. Will it have when the cars cross the stripe for the 325th time in Atlanta on Sunday? You've got to say yes... erm, that is until you think of Jarrett's hot streak and past form. Or maybe, just maybe... Aw heck, I don't know, just watch the thing and enjoy! ■



ATLANTA USA

One of the recurring sights of the season

DER

Jeff Gordon goes into Atlanta 77 points ahead, despite some miserable luck in recent races

“ Nobody has told us we can’t win. Anyway, we wouldn’t listen to them if they did ”

DALE JARRETT

So what happened? Why did it come to this?

Well, hey, we're not exactly talking disasters here. For starters, apart from Gordon, only one other driver has visited victory lane in a Chevrolet Monte Carlo this season, and that was his Rick Hendrick team mate and '96 champ Terry Labonte. Perhaps the question should really be how did Gordon manage to make it this far in a car that hasn't been the equal of Ford's swansong-singing Thunderbird?

Basically, Gordon is NASCAR's benchmark driver. Single-handedly he's changed the rules on how you win championships, putting winning as many races and leading as many laps as possible way above

Kinrade/Sutton Images

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The perfect oval?

An all-new, state-of-the-art circuit in Japan will host CART's first race in Asia next year. By Gordon Kirby

No fewer than seven major new ovals have opened for racing in the United States in the past two years with some three more planned by the year 2000. But from the palatial California, Texas, Homestead and Las Vegas speedways to the rather more basic tracks at Disney World in Florida and outside St Louis, all have, for various reasons, failed to live up to their over-hyped expectations.

Now, the Japanese, and more specifically the Honda Motor Company, have entered the fray. Honda has built Asia's first American-style oval outside Motegi, a tiny town 60 miles north-east of Tokyo,



Dario Franchitti, preparing for his first season with Team Green, gave Motegi the thumbs up after a recent test at the new circuit

New track at Motegi



and the Twin-Ring motorsports complex has re-written the book of quality standards, entitled 'How To Do The Job Right First Time'.

Specifically located in Tochigi Prefecture, not far from Honda's primary research & development facility, Twin-Ring Motegi - which was opened three months ago - will stage its first major race next March 28 with the second round of the '98 CART World Series.

With that in mind, 10 CART teams decamped for an open test on the 1.5-mile oval two weeks ago and all who made the Oriental trip were impressed with what they found.

'With regards to the facility,' commented CART president Andrew

Craig, 'phrases like world class, high quality and terrific attention to detail come to mind. We've enjoyed a very good relationship with the Motegi staff over the last four years, watching the project develop, and we're very impressed with what we've seen.'

Last year's CART champion Jimmy Vasser set the pace in testing two weeks ago, lapping at 215mph, and he believes with more testing the pole time for next March's race will be close to 220mph. That may be a shade too quick for a 1.5-mile oval, but because the track is remarkably smooth and wide with room to race, most CART drivers who tested in fact described the track as enjoyable rather than intimidating to drive.

The corners are shallow-banked at 10 degrees, with the first and second turns swinging through 220 degrees (flat-out for Indycars), and the third and fourth tighter - there's even a short braking zone at the end of the backstretch going into turn three.

'It's a little faster than I had expected,' said Vasser, 'but it's very wide and smooth, and with the tyres getting better in construction I'm not that surprised by the speeds.'

'It's a very enjoyable circuit to drive. I've been here a few times, seen the track under construction, and was here for the opening ceremony three months ago - so I know it's a great place.'

An entirely separate 2.9 mile road course shares only the pit complex with the oval. This track exits the stadium underneath the oval's third turn and re-enters underneath the first and second corners. Indeed, there are several shorter versions of the road course, all completely separate from the oval: a quarter-mile dirt track for rental midgets; a kart track; a small road course for little motorcycle-powered open wheelers, also for rent; and a skid control course and school.

Officially owned by Honda Motor Company and Suzuka Circuit Land Company, the complex - which includes a 130-room hotel - cost US\$400 million to construct, nearly four times more than even the most extravagant of the new American superspeedways. Tickets for next spring's CART race will be limited to 50,000, but the biggest problem will be getting in and out, with a 25 mile dual-carriageway through a series of villages and small towns providing the only access. However, officials hope a separate access road will be built in due course.

Plans for Motegi began almost ten years ago. Honda chairman and president Nobuhiko Kawamoto says the track was originally intended to help Honda celebrate its 50th anniversary in 1998, and to generate enthusiasm for cars in Japan's crowded contemporary environment. Then came a request from Honda America to enter Indycar racing and as the manufacturer's programme took shape, Motegi was transformed into a celebration of American motor sport.

Honda America's desire to race was fuelled by marketing and sales considerations, rather than for R&D purposes, and Kawamoto admits Honda underestimated the technical demands of Indycar racing. 'The first



As a brand new track, Motegi is able to bring teams the most up-to-date facilities

Nippo

KENWOOD

KENWOOD

Penske new-boy Andre Ribeiro was among those using the test to familiarise themselves with the circuit



year we were really miserable,' he chuckles, 'and we certainly noticed that it was really professional. Maybe sometimes it's much more professional and difficult to win than Formula 1 because the regulations are so strict and even for everyone.'

'So we changed our attitude,' Kawamoto continues. 'We said, "Okay, let's try it as a professional activity for the second year." Then we changed the concept of building the 50th anniversary memorial track at Motegi, and took on the commitment to the oval and CART racing.'

'Of course,' he adds, 'we consulted with Mr Craig before deciding the total change of the target of Motegi. We are very pleased to be accepted by CART and the American people.'

As always, Kawamoto emphasises the value of racing to Honda in developing ideas and training engineers. When he mentions the company's 'racing spirit', his soft, good-

“Phrases like world class, high quality and attention to detail come to mind”

ANDREW CRAIG, CART PRESIDENT

humoured voice takes on a hard, forceful edge. 'One of the most important things for us is to give the best product,' Kawamoto notes, 'and for that we need the best engineers. And to educate those engineers and challenge them is the core part of our company's operation.'

'In racing, you cannot give any

excuses. Through racing, we are able to develop the correct technical skills and attitudes. We have some very professional racing people.'

Kawamoto confirmed his company will make a boardroom decision about returning to F1 at the end of next March, but struck a cautionary note about Honda's concern at the stability of F1's technical rules and financial structure, and contrasted the situation with CART.

'F1 is often very unclear and complicated and, on the contrary, American motorsport is very open and fun,' Kawamoto comments. 'Even if we had the intention to come into F1 with a long-term plan, it is unclear whether it would be stable in that time, both in terms of the regulations and our own involvement in the Concorde Agreement. It's really hard to tell from our side, but our intentions should be decided next year after the Motegi CART race.'

Kawamoto said Honda's long-term involvement in CART will continue regardless of its eventual decision on whether to re-enter F1. 'It would not affect our CART programme at all,' Kawamoto declares. 'It is much easier for us to maintain our long-term commitment to CART because our working relationship with CART is clear. That enables us to do our best for as long as possible. And the commitment we have made to Motegi shows the commitment we have to CART.'

Chuckling and flashing his well-known smile, Kawamoto notes there's plenty of room for expansion at Motegi. 'We are using just half of the land we bought, so we have more possibilities to modify Motegi for the future.'

Judging by Kawamoto and Honda's enthusiasm for CART, the future holds big things for Indycar racing in Japan. ■

Home from home

CART sees the value of racing abroad, but it won't lose its roots

Andrew Craig underlined the value of CART racing in Japan: 'Racing on another continent is obviously very important for CART. We are pleased to be racing in Japan, the world's second largest economy. We want to showcase American racing to the Japanese audience, hopefully build a strong fan base and bring some sponsors from Japan back to the US.'

Craig emphasised that CART's international growth is now almost complete, with races in Australia, Brazil and Japan. CART's president says most of the formula's future growth will take place domestically within the US rather than elsewhere in the world.

'This is an American race series,' he notes, 'We are not attempting to be international in itself – what we're attempting to do is export what we believe is the best type of racing in the world, bring it to a few very special



Americans aren't the only CART fans

markets, like Japan, by way of a race, and also bring it to the world via TV.'

'In terms of future opportunities, we'd certainly like to have one race in Europe. The logical place for us would be Germany, then we'd be in the world's three largest economies: the US, Japan and Germany. But you're never going to see CART attempt to become more international by having three or four races overseas at any one time. Our hearts and homes are in America.'



Attendance at the test session shows the locals are more than enthusiastic about Motegi



1, 2, 3

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Steve Soper (left) and his team mate JJ Lehto celebrate victory at Spa-Francorchamps. 'I've never had a better or nicer team mate,' says Soper of his Finnish co-driver

No title – but still a good year

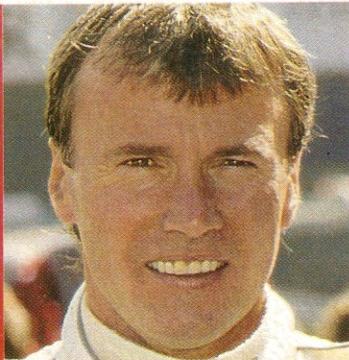
I thoroughly enjoyed this year's GT championship. It had a great calendar, great venues and great racing. The last time I did long distance racing for a whole season was in 1987, but it was very easy for me to get my head back into long distance mode, because basically you drive the same way as you would in a sprint race - you're still flat. You don't look after anything, except the tyres - especially if you want to double stint them - and the fuel consumption.

One of the highlights for me was that until the end of season races in America, we had a 100% finishing record. And, apart from Suzuka, we always finished on the podium, which was why we were in contention for the championship all the way through. And that's not just because we were able to drive our McLaren faster than all the others or set the car up better - you also have to miss backmarkers. And although a lot of the GT2 drivers were great, others were just turning up for odd races and really you needed to be a mind-reader to work out what they were going to do. It was very easy to get caught up in something, but if you waited you just lost too much time. You had to make a decision and go with that move and hope the slower driver had seen you.

Until America, when we did have problems, we always managed to finish. We lost second gear at Suzuka, but JJ (Lehto) got the car to the finish, while Spa was particularly satisfying. JJ was a star in the wet at Spa, because it looked as though everybody else was on slicks. But when I got in the car, within two laps the undertray had come loose and it was vibrating like crazy,

**"I was disturbed
the rules were
changed to allow
the Mercedes to
enter the series "**

STEVE SOPER



STEVE SOPER
MCLAREN GT DRIVER

before it eventually broke off. It was a pig-and-a-half in the quick corners, but despite the problems we were able to win the race. There was a strategy: we knew how fast Bernd Schneider (in the Mercedes) was catching us, and it was just nice to plan it so that we still won the race.

Mugello was satisfying, too. As a team we really worked on the pit stops and everybody got 100% out of themselves. Obviously, it was a disappointment not to win the title.

The worst part was Sebring. We thought we would be competitive there, but not at Laguna, so our chance would be at Sebring. And, after qualifying, we were looking good. We were on pole, the set-up

and tyre package both looked good. JJ and I both liked the circuit and afterwards Schneider admitted to me that they thought they were in trouble. But from the moment Sunday morning dawned, everything went wrong. It was a disastrous day but, even so, with 20 minutes to go, second place was still on the cards, and then the thing burst into flames.

You never give up, but I knew we were going to Laguna needing a hell of a lot of luck. We were still motivated. The team tried to do everything possible, they split JJ and I up to even the odds, but Lady Luck wasn't on our side. Suddenly, after this fantastic year we'd had in Europe and even in Japan, including

four race wins, we went to America and got no points at all.

I was disturbed the rules were changed to allow the Mercedes to enter the series. It was great they were there, but, like everybody else, they should have built a road car, homologated it, and then built a racing car. If we'd known Mercedes was going to come in with that type of car under those circumstances I think McLaren and BMW would have done something a little bit different. I don't want to take anything away, but the door was opened for them and they won - good for them.

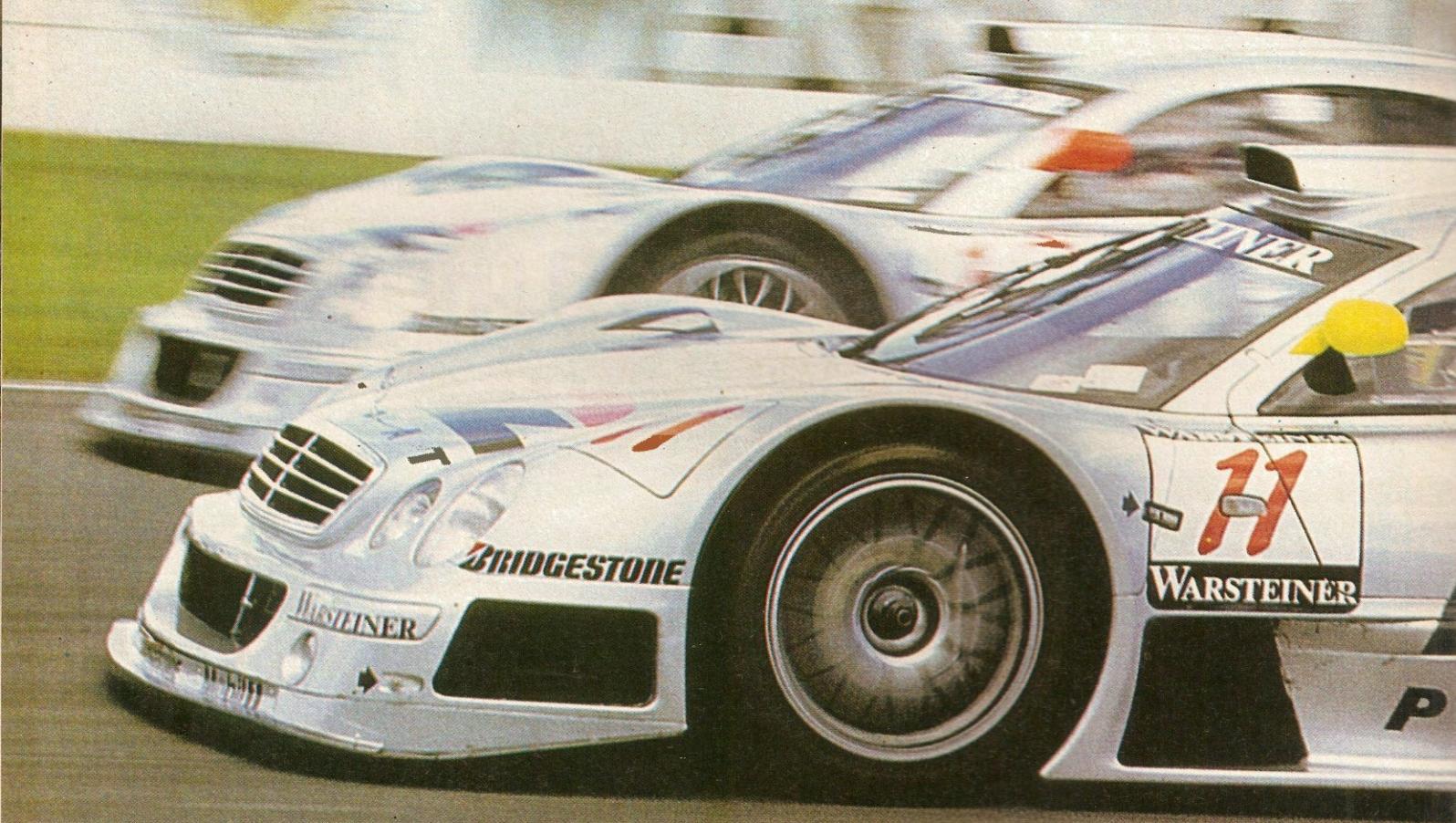
As far as Schneider swapping cars was concerned, I don't have a problem with that - that was always in the rules. The clever thing was that they had two other competitive cars for him to get into when he had problems. We didn't need that because, up until the US rounds, we had 100% reliability.

JJ as a person and a co-driver was great. I've never had a better or nicer team mate. He was given the job to start the race (normally) and to qualify the car and he gave me a free hand to set the car up as I liked, and 99 times out of 100 he was happy with what I ended up with. So we had a good understanding. It worked very well and showed up in how competitive our car was compared to the other McLarens.

It has been a good season. It was disappointing to lose it at the end, but we did take it to the last race and under the circumstances - most of the season we were up against not just one Mercedes, but three - we did a good job and with a little bit of luck there could have been a different ending. ■

Silver dream

Lawrence/Sutton Images



Brooks/Sutton Images



Merc to the fore. Eventual winner Schneider leads at the first corner at Donington Park

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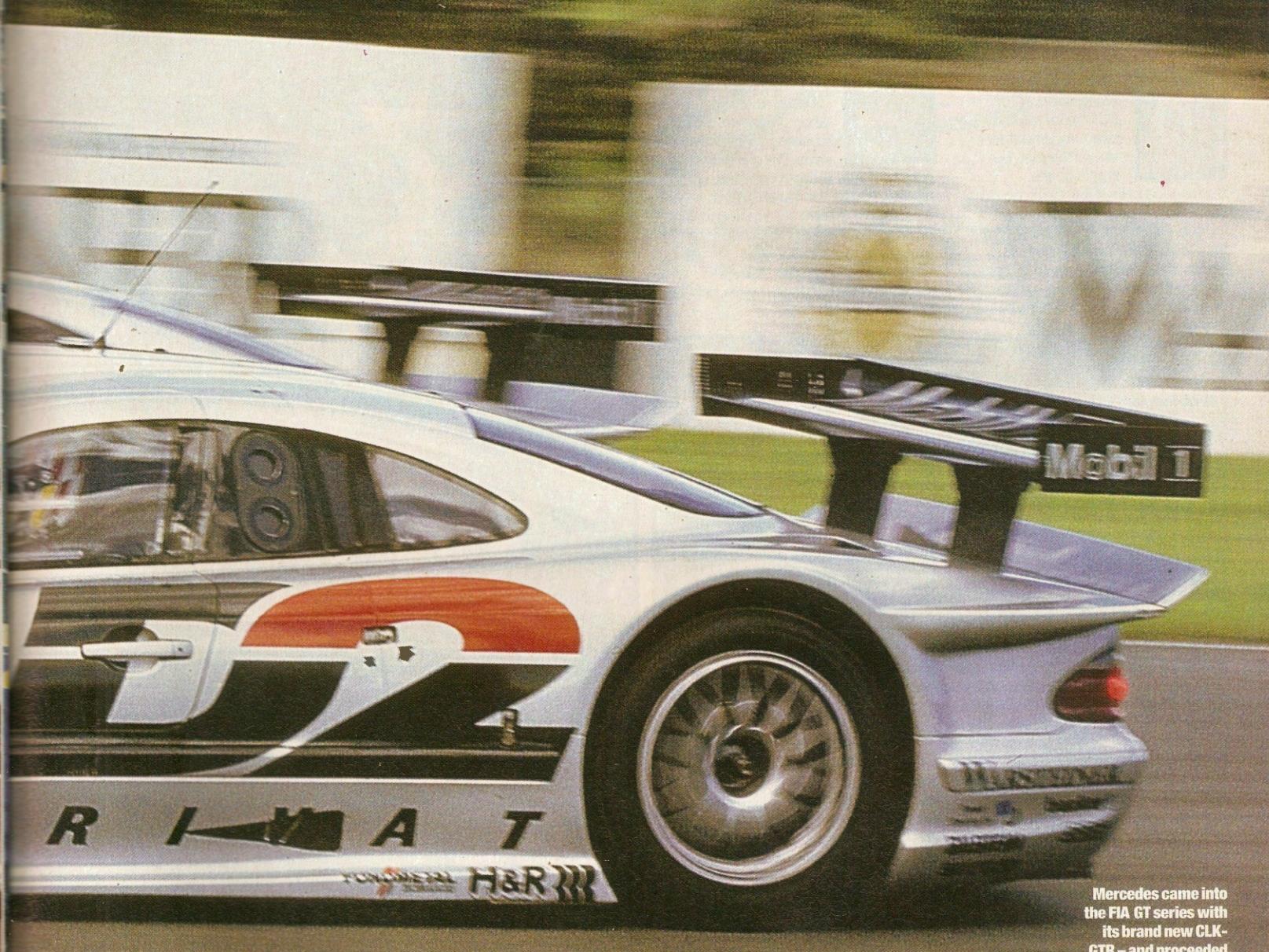
Mercedes and Bernd Schneider exploited the rules to dominate what may be the first and last FIA GT series, despite a strong McLaren challenge. By Gary Watkins

The effect of two controversial regulations - one introduced just before the season's start, the other abolished as it was coming to an end - on the inaugural FIA GT Championship cannot be underestimated. The first hastened the entry of the Mercedes CLK-GTR into the series, and the second allowed the lead driver in the Three-Pointed Star's camp to twice jump into one of his team mates's cars when his own hit problems, yet still

come away with a maximum score. And the 17 extra points gained as a result of these two victories were enough for Bernd Schneider to claim the title for Mercedes.

Although it was clear Mercedes's motorsport partner AMG was building an all-new GT contender (started following the cancellation of the International Touring Car Championship in September last year) what was not known was when the car would be eligible to race. Then, in an ill-timed move that came

turns to gold



Mercedes came into the FIA GT series with its brand new CLK-GTR – and proceeded to dominate the series

just days before the CLK-GTR turned a wheel for the first time, the rules were changed to allow the Mercedes to race without the road-going type approval that rivals McLaren-BMW, Porsche and Lotus had already spent not inconsiderable amounts of time and money achieving as per the regulations. The FIA, the governing body of motorsport, muttered something about increasing the number and variety of cars in the series, and it's true that the move also allowed in the American Panoz marque's front-engined supercar, designed by top chassis constructor Reynard.

The result was that AMG and Mercedes had two examples of the CLK-GTR – a car that leapfrogged right over the opposition in terms of

performance – ready to go on Friday morning of the opening round at Hockenheim in April. BMW may have paid motorsport partner McLaren to come up with a long-tailed version of the car that had twice won the Global Endurance GT Series, and Porsche eventually turned up with an evolution of its parts-bin homologation special, the 911 GT1, but Mercedes had what was a purpose-built racing car. This meant the 1997 FIA GT Championship should have been a cut-and-dried affair, as Schneider's Hockenheim pole – nearly a second clear of the rest – seemed to suggest.

But just over six months later, McLaren, BMW and the Schnitzer team, which ran the German mar-

que's first concerted sportscar campaign for the best part of two decades, remained in the title hunt, as the 11-round series reached its climax at Laguna Seca.

McLaren-BMW F1 GTRs won the opening three rounds – two for JJ Lehto and Steve Soper, one for Roberto Ravaglia and Peter Kox – while Mercedes was unsurprisingly struggling with the reliability of its new car. But the real reasons why the championship went down to the wire were an outstanding display of wet-weather driving from Lehto at Spa-Francorchamps in July, and then a freak accident with a backmarker in September. The latter not only robbed Schneider of maximum points at Mugello, but enabled the

Anglo-Finnish McLaren pairing to notch up its fourth win of the year.

These hiccoughs apart, the CLK-GTR was unbeatable from its fitting maiden victory on home ground at the Nurburgring at the end of June. Apart from Spa, where Lehto produced something special on one of the ultimate drivers' circuits, the Merc squad – which expanded to three cars at the second German race – held a virtual monopoly on the front row. And the fact that the CLK-GTR still wasn't totally reliable didn't matter thanks to the bizarre sporting regulation allowing drivers to swap cars, a rule that threatened to make a mockery of the championship.

At the A1-Ring, Schneider's car was hit by an alternator problem, ▶

The top ten

1 JJ Lehto

The Finn gets the nod ahead of champion Schneider for the top spot by virtue of a series of sensational performances in what was definitely not the best car out there. His wet-weather drive in the race at Spa and pole lap the day before were the highlights of a season which saw Lehto back to his best, three years on from a neck-breaking Formula 1 crash.

**2 Bernd Schneider**

Along with Lehto, Schneider stands head and shoulders above the rest, but thanks to the dominance of the CLK-GTR, he never had to produce the kind of virtuoso performance that became the Finn's trademark. He did, however, make the other so-called stars in the Mercedes line-up look ordinary, and there were none of the mistakes that prevented him hanging on to his International Touring Car title in 1996.

3 Steve Soper

With Lehto taking the starring role at Schnitzer, it's easy to overlook the touring car ace's contribution to their title assault. While Lehto grabbed the limelight with the quallies, it was Soper's job to set up the car in qualifying. Come the race, he was always fast and consistent. High point was his role in the Spa victory, when he nursed his ailing McLaren home; low point Sebring, and the two incidents with Mercedes.

**4 Jean-Marc Gounon**

Can a driver who wiped out his team's entire three-car squad on the first lap at Spa be rated so highly? The answer is yes, because Gounon not only proved he was the ace in the pack of the GTC team's stellar line-up, but because in race conditions he was quite often a match for Lehto lap for lap.

5 Yannick Dalmas

The three-time Le Mans winner led the factory Porsche squad's ascent up the order over the second half of the season, fittingly scoring two end-of-season podiums. Easy to overlook, this quiet and intense driver truly bounced back from a difficult year in the ITC.

**6 Klaus Ludwig**

The old warhorse appeared to take a while to come to grips with the CLK-GTR – and by his own admission was never as quick as Schneider – but four wins proves that, at the age of 48, Ludwig still has a few good years as a sportscar driver ahead of him.

7 Alexander Wurz

Difficult to judge a man who, on the face of it, was dealt a rum hand by the AMG Mercedes squad. Wurz proved quick and consistent, while Schneider made the headlines, but when he finally got his hands on a set of qualifiers at Laguna he promptly banged his CLK-GTR on pole, no questions asked.

**8 Alessandro Nannini**

Pushed Schneider close in qualifying – and sometimes in the opening stages of the race. But over the full hour he could seldom compete with his team mate, the Italian's more aggressive driving style taking its toll on his tyres. Although he was never on a par with Schneider, the suspicion is, of course, that AMG never wanted him to compete with its number one.

9 David Brabham

The star of the Panoz pack, Brabham did exactly the kind of professional job you'd expect, and after a trying season his reward was third place at Sebring.

**10 Franck Lagorce**

The fastest Panoz driver over one lap, if not the most consistent, Lagorce proved he has a great sportscar career ahead of him, but was then inexplicably passed over for a full-time Panoz contract in favour of fellow French DAMS team mate Eric Bernard.

● Bubbling under

Old hands Thierry Boutsen (pictured right) and **Hans Stuck** will win big races again, but results were thin on the ground for the duo this year, partly because they got the lion's share of the factory Porsche's bad luck. **Ralf Kelleners, Emmanuel Collard** and, early in the season, **Pedro Lamy** proved in privateer Porsches that they are sportscar stars of the future, while **Scot Allan McNish** did likewise in a handful of appearances in the factory car. Schnitzer's second-string pairing of **Peter Kox** and **Roberto Ravaglia** (pictured below) – the latter now retired – remained just that. They were lucky to win at Silverstone, dreadfully unlucky not to win at Helsinki, but in the second half of the year they normally weren't in the same game as McLaren colleagues Lehto and Soper. Stalwarts **John Nielsen, Geoff Lees** and **Anders Olofsson** each proved quick and consistent in GTC McLarens, while **Jan Lammers** occasionally worked miracles with the uncompetitive Lotus.



The BMW boys go wild as Steve Soper (sharing with JJ Lehto) nurses home his McLaren to clinch a brilliant wet weather victory at Spa-Francorchamps

so he merely swapped over to partner Klaus Ludwig and Bernd Maylander's mount to notch up his second victory of the year. Then, at Suzuka, Schneider and regular co-driver Alexander Wurz were leading again when the suspension started causing problems. No worries – just put Schneider in the next best-placed Mercedes, this time the chassis driven by Alessandro Nannini and Marcel Tiemann.

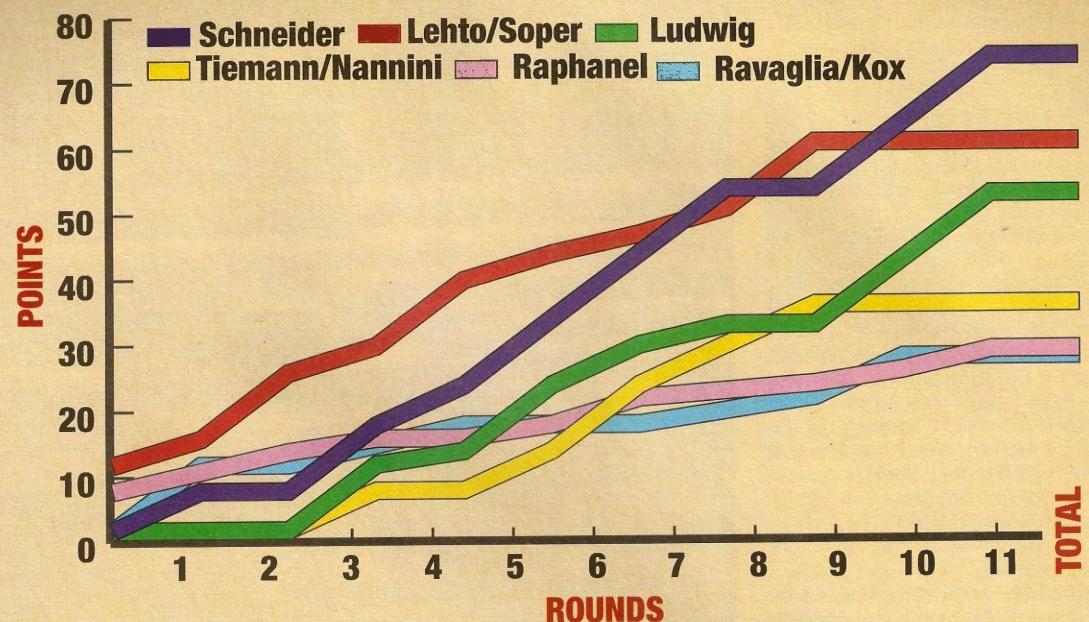
Then, in a move that proved sportsmanship is still alive and well even at the highest levels of international motorsport, Mercedes and AMG bowed to the intense lobbying from rival teams and agreed to give their support for an immediate rule change. Just by way of a two-fingered salute to the knockers,

Schneider and Wurz led home another one-two at Donington Park in the most dominant display of the year from the Three-Pointed Star.

Despite this mid-season hat-trick, the Schnitzer McLaren's pair of victories either side of it, coupled with a consistent finishing record which saw them in the points every time out, meant Soper and Lehto were able to take a seven-point lead into the two-race US climax to the series.

When Lehto qualified on pole at Sebring, for only the third time of the season, it looked as though the pendulum of fortune had swung in favour of Schnitzer. As it had around the streets of Helsinki, on which Lehto had notched up his first pole, the McLaren looked truly competitive against the Mercedes in Florida.

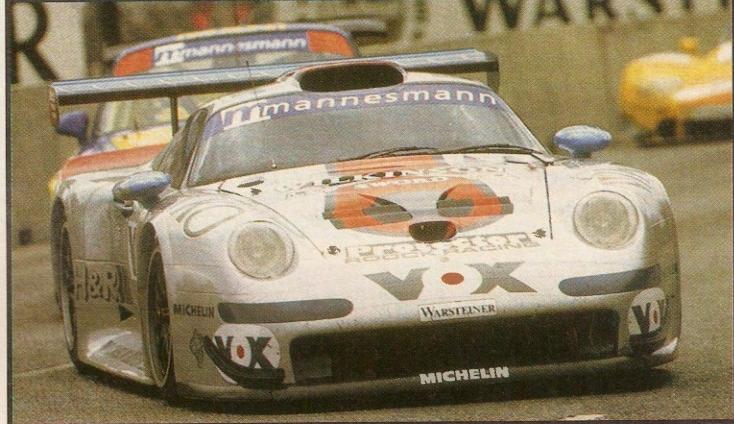
The fight for the title



The AMG quietly suggested that Schnitzer's Michelin tyres had an advantage over its Bridgestones. But it seemed obvious to everyone else – especially the McLaren's designer, Gordon Murray – that once the CLK-GTR, which normally ran a controversially-low rideheight, was sorted out to deal with bumpy circuits, its advantage over the McLaren and Porsche 911 GT1, with their road-based suspension geometry, was reduced or even negated.

But as dramatically as their luck had turned when Schneider was punted out of the lead at Mugello, Lehto and Soper were hit by a triple dose of ill-fortune just as it seemed as though the title was within their grasp. After colliding with fellow front row man Schneider at the first corner, Soper, starting a race for the first time of the year, then had a second controversial moment with a Mercedes, this time the car of guesting Indycar star Greg Moore.

After spinning, Soper headed for the pits, only to lose over a minute when the engine wouldn't restart after his flat-spotted tyres had been changed. The Briton then started a fightback on a flooded track, continued by an inspired Lehto, which put the car on course for second place

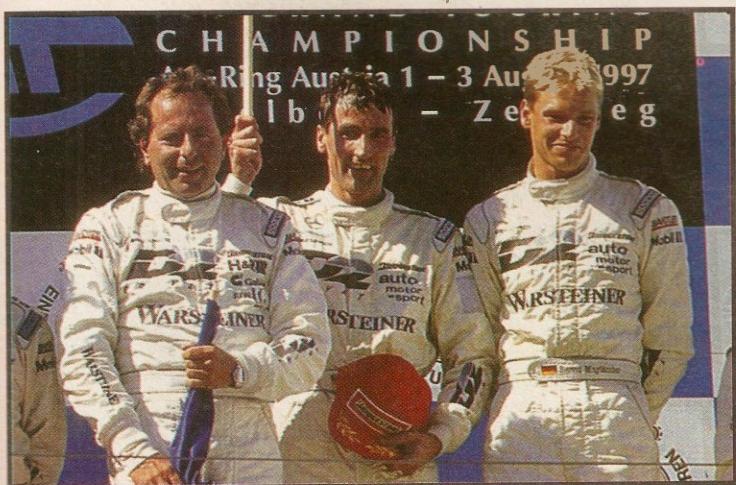


The private Rrock Porsche's second in Helsinki wasn't matched by the factory until the end

ff Schneider, as Ludwig put it, 'was on a different plane in the Mercedes CLK-GTR' jj

team's subsequent decision to split up its championship contenders – Lehto going with Kox, Soper with Ravaglia – ultimately backfired, neither adding to his points tally.

Another dominant win, his sixth of the season, was the perfect way for Schneider to take the title. He may have had by far the best car in the series and all the resources of the AMG team behind him, but Schneider, as Ludwig put it, 'was on a different plane in the CLK-GTR'. Only in the light of those 17 ►

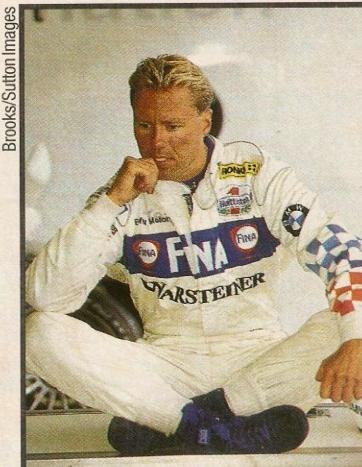


Schneider (centre) controversially jumped into Ludwig/Maylander's car to win in Austria

behind Schneider and Ludwig, who had moved over to the lead Merc for the US races.

With little more than 15 minutes to go, flames started licking around the rear of the car, and the next moment Lehto was bailing out and going in search of a fire extinguisher to quell the flames. It was a heart-rending moment for Lehto, who gave his all every time he sat in the car, not least because he knew that he and Soper had to take a points advantage to Laguna – a medium-speed circuit which was ideal Mercedes territory – if they were to take the title.

But Lehto couldn't have predicted how little of a fight he would be able to put up in California. The Schnitzer F1 GTRs were all at sea at Laguna. The Finn qualified poorly and the



Champ, no, but JJ Lehto starred this year

► points his car-swapping antics gained him can it be said that he didn't deserve a title to add to his Class 1 touring car double of 1995.

Sometimes it didn't seem like it, but the FIA GT Championship wasn't just about the Schnitzer BMW and AMG Mercedes teams. The third German manufacturer team to take part, Porsche, had finished the 1996 season on a high, winning three times in the predecessor of the FIA championship, the Global Endurance GT Series. But in 1997 it got a taste of its own medicine. Porsche had effectively rendered the original incarnation of the McLaren obsolete, but now its 911 GT1 was overtaken, first by the long-tail McLaren and then by the Mercedes. While McLaren had been racking up the miles with its new car, Porsche had been busy building '96-spec cars for customers and designing an 'evolution' version of the 911 GT1.

Just how low the FIA GT Championship was on Porsche's original list of priorities could be seen by the solo factory entry it brought to Hockenheim. A car that still bore scrutineering stickers from the previous year's Le Mans was described by one of its drivers as having only had 'a quick polish after spending the winter going around the motorshows'. Porsche's plight was made worse by changes to the power-controlling air-restrictor rules, which deprived the 911 GT1 the best part of 50bhp. Although the FIA reversed the changes after only

Sutton Images



The privateer GTC McLaren squad, the reigning Global champions, had a bright start to the year, but it went backwards thereafter

Ralph Hardwick/LAT

“The majority of Porsche customers must have ended '97 wishing they'd spent their money at McLaren”

'Stuckie' and Porsche boss Norbert Singer

GT2 class

A clean sweep for Chrysler, with Justin Bell snatching the drivers' title

Ask Olivier Beretta and Philippe Gache why they didn't win the GT2 section of the FIA GT Championship, and they would be able to provide six very good reasons, ranging from a loose wheel to a vapour lock.

Had the factory Chrysler pairing avoided just one of these problems, encountered when they looked on course for class honours, the Franco-Monegasque pairing would have jointly claimed the drivers' title. But the final ignominy of a stop-go penalty for speeding in the series finale meant they could only finish third in the points.

When they didn't hit trouble, Beretta and Gache won every time out, taking four victories. And, to be fair, they should have done. As a couple of Formula 3000 front-runners in their

time, they were easily the best driving combination in the class. What's more, in the Viper they had the best car at their disposal, and in ORECA they had the best team.

The galling fact for Beretta and Gache was that their problems weren't for the most part their fault, but as the old adage goes 'to finish first, first you have to finish'. And finishing was something that their ORECA team mate, Justin Bell, did every time, despite sharing with no fewer than four different co-drivers during the year.

But despite Bell's consistency, he needed ORECA to invoke team orders in the closing stages of the Laguna Seca finale to take the title. With Bell, who was paired with Trans-Am veteran Tommy Archer, running third behind Roock Porsche driver Stephane Ortelli

two races, Porsche didn't start to move towards the sharp end of the grid until after it started to bring two 'evos' to each FIA race after Le Mans.

The torrid conditions at Spa certainly played a part in the factory team's first podium of the year, but the improvements being made enabled Frenchman Yannick Dalmas to qualify second at Suzuka, a fast circuit which suited a car designed with the even faster Circuit de la Sarthe in mind. But only at the death did Porsche turn up with a car that was a truly competitive proposition.

The only team to test at Laguna, Porsche led throughout the opening

hour thanks to a storming first lap from test driver and sportscar rookie Allan McNish. But it was Dalmas and veteran team mate Bob Wollek who had the better race, finishing second and on the same lap as Schneider.

By the time the 'evo' car was competitive, the majority of the six customer teams which forked out for 911 GT1s at the beginning of the year were already sitting on the sidelines, having either given up the car as a bad cause or having failed to persuade sponsors to back a losing horse. The high points for the privateers were the German Roock team's second place with Ralf Kelleners and

and the penalised Beretta, the title would have gone to Ortelli's team mate Bruno Eichmann by one point. But when Beretta slowed on the final lap to let Bell past, this margin was reversed. ORECA thus claimed the drivers' crown to add to the manufacturers' title it had won at the previous race.

Roock's front-line Porsche 911 GT2 took the fight to Chrysler all year. Originally it was handled by

Eichmann, GT2 champion in the 1996 Global Endurance Series, Claudia Hurtgen and Ni Amorim. The last-named fell out of the equation when the first two switched to one of Roock's sister cars when their own hit problems at the A1-Ring, and then the team separated Eichmann and Hurtgen in a bet-hedging exercise which almost paid dividends at Laguna Seca.



The potent Chrysler Vipers were the class of the GT2 field, taking both drivers' and teams' championships

Sutton Images

Porsche at Le Mans

Until the 23rd hour, the factory 911 GT1 was on course for glory...

The tearful eyes of the Porsche hierarchy at the end of the Le Mans 24-Hours told a tale of disappointment that had as much to say about the factory team's failure to win a race it had led nearly all the way as it did about the realisation that its 911 GT1, after two years as a frontrunner, was now unlikely to follow in the footsteps of a line of famous contenders from the Stuttgart make to have won the French classic.

After finishing a close second and third with the then new homologation special, Porsche built a heavily revised evo version of the car, with revised suspension and a new body for '96. Nearly four seconds faster around the Circuit de la Sarthe than its predecessor in qualifying, the car claimed the GT pole – and front row place through Thierry Boutsen.

It was this 'veterans' car, also driven by Hans Stuck and Bob Wollek, that established itself in the lead after four hours, holding the advantage right through the night.

Just after 8am Wollek, attempting to win the race at his 27th attempt, spun in an unexplained incident in which Gulf McLaren pilot Jean-Marc Gounon appears to have played a part.

Into the breach came the 'young guns' 911 GT1 Evo driven by three-time Le Mans winner Yannick Dalmas,

LAT



The 911s led, but lost out, at La Sarthe

Ralf Kelleners and Emmanuel Collard. With a lap in hand over the chasing pack, victory looked assured until, with just two hours to go, the hopes of the Porsche factory and the car itself went up in smoke, an oil leak causing a major fire.

But all was not lost for Porsche: the Joest Racing Porsche WSC95 sports racing car was waiting to pick up the pieces for a second straight victory.

Ironically, the result may have been the same, but there was one major difference between Le Mans this year and last. In '96, the WSC95 led for 23 hours while the 911 GT1s pursued it, but this time around the drivers of the sports racer, Michele Alboreto, Stefan Johansson and Tom Kristensen, were always playing a game of catch-up.

downhill, then Panoz, which was making its debut in international motorsport, was on an upward trend, albeit from a pretty low starting point. The two factory cars, entered by 1995 Global champion team David Price Racing, and a solo customer car for the crack DAMS Formula 3000 squad, were barely tested when they turned up for Hockenheim, and worse, their underpowered and thirsty Ford V8s had a propensity to catch fire.

Although David Brabham, who quickly emerged as the star of the DPR squad, somehow wrung a lap from his GTR good enough for the front row at Silverstone in May, it wasn't until British tuner Zytek lent it electronic expertise to the engines, built by famed NASCAR tuner Roush, that things started to look up. The DAMS drivers, Formula 1 refugees Franck Lagorce and Eric Bernard, used Michelin tyres to good effect to notch up a run of top-10 qualifying performances, peaking

with fifth at Mugello. But in race-trim, the Goodyear-shod DPR cars were a match for its French rival, beating it to the honour of scoring Panoz's first points at Sebring. Brabham drove a storming first hour in the wet to put the car in the top three, and then Brit Perry McCarthy kept it all together in equally atrocious conditions to secure the final place on the podium.

The factory Lotus team had predicted mid-season that its new Elise-based GT1 would be challenging for podiums by the end of the year, but the financial minnow of the FIA series rarely looked like getting into top-six point-scoring positions with either of its two cars. Lead driver Jan Lammers reckoned the GT1 was one of the best chassis out there, but a normally-aspirated V8 – which produced too little power, used too much fuel and was unreliable to boot – never allowed the sportscar veteran and his hard-trying team mates to fully exploit it.



Belgium was a disaster for GTC when all three McLarens were wiped out in one shunt

Stephane Ortelli against a depleted field – several teams missed the event to prepare for Le Mans – at Helsinki in May. But the majority of Porsche customers must have ended the year wishing they'd spent their money at McLaren, whose leading privateer team held on to third place in the teams' points despite the Porsche factory team's late charge.

Although the Gulf-backed GTC squad, the reigning Global champion team, was originally billed as a pseudo works team, courtesy of the two cars it was lent by McLaren, it was truly a privateer outfit. But that didn't stop it from coming into the season with high hopes of matching the Schnitzer cars. A two-three finish at Hockenheim led by Frenchmen Jean-Marc Gounon and Pierre-Henri Raphanel, backed up GTC's hopes. But after John Nielsen produced a storming comeback drive to third at Helsinki following a poor opening hour from gentleman driver Thomas Bscher – who brought a third car to

the team – the results tailed off, and the gap to Schnitzer grew.

It wasn't just that the cash-flush German team which was stealing a march on the Brits – whose efforts to run 'on a tight budget' were not helped by a series of major rebuilds – by sneaking in some pre-race testing at nearly every venue. Just as important was Michelin's decision to focus attention on its factory teams in an effort to keep up with Bridgestone, which was in the enviable position of supplying only Mercedes.

That's not to say that at least one of the GTC cars wouldn't normally be mixing it with the second Schnitzer car of Kox and Ravaglia, which in the middle season at least was a pale imitation of the championship-leading McLaren. And a fourth and final podium at Suzuka, for Gounon, Raphanel and Swede Anders Olofsson, as well as consistent point scoring, was just enough to hang on to the third place in the teams' classification.

If GTC's season went slowly



The Elise-based Lotus GT1 promised much, but top six positions were hard to come by



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Lotus was well and truly suckered by the FIA's series of rule changes in the spring. When the twin-turbo engine around which the car was designed was rendered uncompetitive by the same changes to the air-restrictor sizes that affected Porsche, the factory team took the opportunity presented by the new homologation rules to change to a normally-aspirated unit. Had Lotus known that three races down the line, there would be a U-turn on restrictor sizes, it probably wouldn't have bothered.

Only late in the season, when the German Thielert tuning company got involved, did the engine begin to become anything like a competitive proposition. But it was case of too little, too late, the team finishing the year pointless, despite some encouraging outings, including seventh on the grid for Lammers at Nurburgring.

Proving what might have been had the GT1 been fitted with a competitive engine, the customer GBF team, whose cars carried Benetton stickers on their flanks, notched up a couple of points. Against a reduced entry and on a street circuit where power wasn't everything, both the Italian team's entries were competitive, the lead car driven by former Grand Prix drivers Luca Badoer and Mimmo Schiattarella heading for a

FIA GT CHAMPIONSHIP 1997

Pos	Driver (Nat)	Team	Car	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
GT1															
1	Bernd Schneider (D)	AMG Mercedes	Mercedes CLK-GTR	27	2	8	1	2	1	1	1	R	1	1	72
2	JJ Lehto (SF)	Schnitzer BMW	McLaren F1 GTR	1	3	1	3	1	3	4	3	1	R	R	59
	Steve Soper (GB)	Schnitzer BMW	McLaren F1 GTR	1	3	1	3	1	3	4	3	1	R	R	59
4	Klaus Ludwig (D)	AMG Mercedes	Mercedes CLK-GTR	-	-	16	1	5	1	2	4	9	1	1	51
5	Alessandro Nannini (I)	AMG Mercedes	Mercedes CLK-GTR	27	32	16	2	17	2	1	2	2	R	8	34
	Marcel Tiemann (D)	AMG Mercedes	Mercedes CLK-GTR	27	32	-	2	17	2	1	2	2	R	8	34
7	Pierre-Henri Raphanel (F)	GTC (Gulf)	McLaren F1 GTR	2	4	4	5	R	5	3	6	6	5	4	27
8	Peter Kox (NL)	Schnitzer BMW	McLaren F1 GTR	R	1	R	4	4	R	8	5	5	2	11	26
	Roberto Ravaglia (I)	Schnitzer BMW	McLaren F1 GTR	R	1	R	4	4	R	8	5	5	2	R	26
10	Alexander Wurz (A)	AMG Mercedes	Mercedes CLK-GTR	R	2	8	-	2	4	7	1	R	7	7	25
11	Jean-Marc Gounon (F)*	GTC (Gulf)	McLaren F1 GTR	2	NS	4	5	R	-	3	6	6	5	4	22
12	Bob Wollek (F)	Schubel	Porsche 911 GT1	6	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Porsche AG (wrks)	Porsche 911 GT1	-	-	-	R	3	6	5	16	3	4	2	19
13	Yannick Dalmas (F)	Roock Racing	Porsche 911 GT1	5	R	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Porsche AG (wrks)	Porsche 911 GT1	-	-	-	R	3	7	10	16	3	4	2	19
	Bernd Maylander (D)	AMG Mercedes	Mercedes CLK-GTR	-	-	-	R	-	1	2	4	9	-	-	19
15	Thierry Boutsen (B)	Porsche AG (wrks)	Porsche 911 GT1	4	5	-	10	R	6	5	11	4	6	5	18
16	Ralf Kelleners (D)	Roock	Porsche 911 GT1	5	R	2	R	7	R	13	-	-	-	-	-
		Porsche AG (wrks)	Porsche 911 GT1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	3	-	15
17	Hans-Joachim Stuck (D)	Porsche AG (wrks)	Porsche 911 GT1	4	5	-	10	R	-	5	11	-	6	5	10
18	John Nielsen (DK)	GTC (Gulf)	McLaren F1 GTR	3	9	3	7	R	6	-	26	16	10	9	-
19	Thomas Bscher (D)	GTC (Gulf)	McLaren F1 GTR	3	9	3	7	R	R	-	26	16	10	8	-
20	Andrew Gilbert-Scott (GB)	GTC (Gulf)	McLaren F1 GTR	R	4	4	R	R	R	6	-	-	-	7	-
	Anders Olofsson (S)	GTC (Gulf)	McLaren F1 GTR	-	-	-	R	R	5	3	7	8	10	6	7

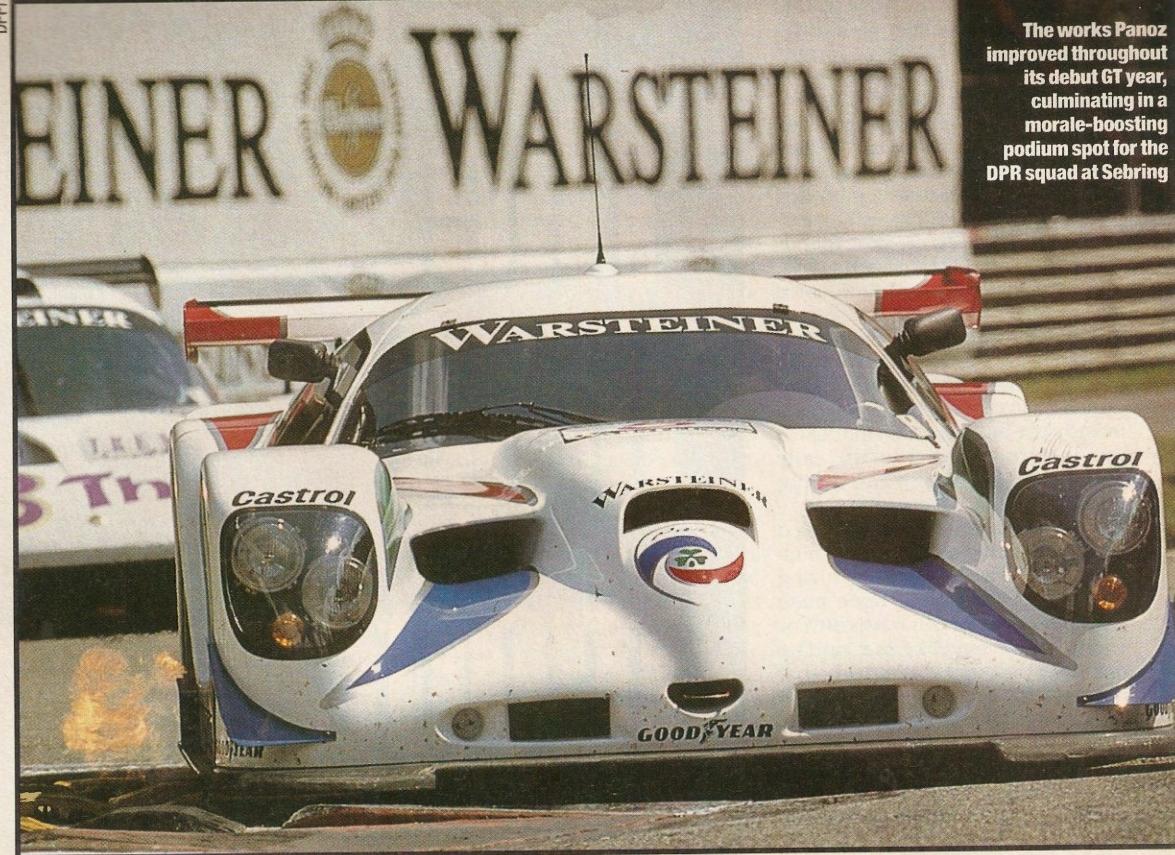
Championship positions - Teams: 1, AMG Mercedes, 110; 2, Team BMW Motorsport, 85; 3, Gulf Team Davidoff, 37; 4, Porsche AG, 35; 5, Roock Racing, 8; 6, David Price Racing, 4; 7, Parabolica Motorsport, 3; 8, GBF; 9=, Schubel Engineering, 1; 9=, BMS Scuderia Italia, 1

1	Justin Bell (GB)	Viper Team ORECA Chrysler Viper	2	1	-	2	1	3	3	3	1	2	2	66
2	Bruno Eichmann (CH)	Roock	Porsche 911 GT2	3	2	1	1	6	1	5	2	2	R	165
3	Olivier Beretta (MC)	Viper Team ORECA Chrysler Viper	1	3	-	R	2	2	1	1	R	1	3	60
	Philippe Gache (F)	Viper Team ORECA Chrysler Viper	1	3	-	R	2	2	1	1	R	1	3	60
5	Claudia Hurtgen (D)	Roock	Porsche 911 GT2	3	2	1	1	6	1	5	2	2	R	55
6	Ni Amorim (P)	Roock	Porsche 911 GT2	3	2	1	1	6	R	5	4	3	3	44
7	Tommy Archer (USA)	Viper Team ORECA Chrysler Viper	2	1	-	-	-	-	3	-	2	2	32	
	Stephane Ortelli (F)	Roock	Porsche 911 GT2	13	8	-	-	8	1	-	2	2	R	32
9	Marc Duez (B)	Viper Team ORECA Chrysler Viper	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
10	Luca Drudi (I)	GT Racing Team	Porsche 911 GT2	R	-	-	13	10	-	-	-	-	-	-
		Agusta	Porsche 911 GT2	-	-	-	-	-	R	-	-	-	-	-
		Viper Team Oreca Chrysler Viper	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	-	-	-	14

Championship positions - Teams: 1, Viper Team Oreca, 126; 2, Roock Racing, 83; 3, Konrad Motorsport, 15; 4=, Marcos Racing

International, 13; 4=, Krauss Motorsport, 13; 6, Karl Augustin, 8; 7, Chamberlain Viper Team

Drivers listed according to finishing position. Championship rounds 1 Hockenheim (D), Apr 13; 2 Silverstone (GB), May 11; 3 Helsinki (SF), May 25; 4 Nurburgring (D), Jun 29; 5 Spa-Francorchamps (B), Jul 20; 6 A1-Ring (A), Aug 3; 7 Suzuka (J), Aug 24; 8 Donington Park (GB), Sep 14; 9 Mugello (I), Sep 28; 10 Sebring (USA), Oct 18; 11 Laguna Seca (USA), Oct 26. Scoring system 10-6-4-3-2-1 for the first six finishers in each class. *FIA standings credited to Gounon with three points from Helsinki even though he did not drive.



The works Panoz improved throughout its debut GT year, culminating in a morale-boosting podium spot for the DPR squad at Sebring

podium when the latter collided with Raphanel's GTC McLaren. Still, Italian Formula 3 Champion Andrea Boldrini and sportscar veteran Mauro Martini came home fifth, despite a minor engine problem, a slipping clutch and a couple of spins.

Run by former Ferrari Club Italia team boss Franco Meiners, GBF was meant to have been something of a satellite factory team, but when the works swapped engines, the Italians went their own way with the turbo. The Helsinki performance turned out to be a false dawn for a team that more often than not brought up the rear of the GT1 field.

Although the GT1 class contingent shrunk a little as the season drew to a close, joint FIA series organiser Stephane Ratel, the former Global organiser who guided the new series after his own was annexed by the FIA, boasted he had as many cars for the season finale as he did for the opening round, the GT2 class filling the void. Talk of the demise of the series, he said, was premature.

But the plain facts are that, at this moment, the future of the FIA GT Championship is uncertain. BMW and Lotus have already pulled the plug on their GT programmes (although the former has yet to announce it) and the participation of Porsche and even Mercedes is in doubt. The manufacturers claim that the series offers little return on their investment, especially in terms of TV exposure. But, ironically, it was the giant sums they were spending that started to force out the privateer teams as the season wore on...

The 1997 season may have produced a great battle between Mercedes and BMW, but the prospects of a repeat performance in 1998 look bleak, basically because the rest were nowhere, and might not be inclined to come back. ■

Prior to the final round at California Speedway, Steve Horne's Tasman Motorsports Group was already assured of its third Indy Lights Championship title; but his two Marlboro Brazilian Team drivers, Tony Kanaan and Helio Castro Neves, remained embroiled in a fascinating duel for supremacy.

The two 21-year-olds, close friends and rivals since their karting days, had proven evenly-matched since joining forces with Horne in preparation for the 1996 season. Last winter, however, Kanaan was bothered by a trapped nerve in his leg which prevented him from maximising the benefits of an extensive test programme, and in the early races he was unable to match the hot pace set by Castro Neves.

'I had a lot of hard times,' admitted the charismatic Kanaan in his quaintly accented - and rapidly improving - English. 'When your team mate wins the race and you finish fifth or eighth, something like that, and he made the pole and you're 10th, that makes you think about how good you are.'

Sure enough, Castro Neves qualified on the pole for race one at Homestead, with Kanaan 10th. But while Castro Neves slipped out of

I was asking on the radio and nobody was answering me. I thought 'Everyone is crying' "

TONY KANAAN

The boys from Brazil

Three men dominated the Indy Lights title fight; good news for one country... By Jeremy Shaw



The Tasman's of Kanaan and Castro Neves lead the pack into the first corner in Toronto

the points after brushing a wall, Kanaan kept his wits about him and worked his way through to sixth. Next time out, in Long Beach, Castro Neves again out-paced his team mate, driving flawlessly to victory from the pole. Once more, Kanaan kept his cool and finished fifth. The points were to stand him in good stead. Ironically, when Kanaan finally hit full stride at Savannah, qualifying second behind Castro Neves, he experienced his only retirement of the season due to a bro-

ken throttle spring. But thereafter he was rarely outside the top five. He finished a strong third at Milwaukee and added podium finishes in each of the next six races, including a pair of accomplished victories at Detroit and Trois-Rivières.

Castro Neves, meanwhile, squandered a commanding 29-point lead prior to Trois-Rivières by being involved in two separate incidents. He also failed to score at Vancouver.

The Fontana finale featured a sensational slipstreaming battle for the



Brazilian one-two-three... Da Matta won at Laguna Seca, the Tasman duo close behind

lead, and while Kanaan had begun the race with the luxury of an 11-point advantage, all of that and more was erased following inadvertent contact with Robby Unser on lap 33. The pendulum seemed to have swung once more in favour of Castro Neves, who led the race as Kanaan fell to 15th after pitting to replace a couple of punctured tyres. Castro Neves, though, was unable to hold onto the top spot, slipping to fifth while Kanaan profited from a late-race accident to finish ninth. It was

enough - although Kanaan didn't know it at the time.

'I was asking on the radio and nobody was answering me,' said a wide-eyed Kanaan. 'I thought, man, I lose the championship; everybody is crying, no one will answer me.'

In fact, the radio was broken. His crew, headed by Charles Long, was already celebrating.

'Of course I'm disappointed, but that's motor racing,' said a philosophical Castro Neves. 'My team mate, Tony, was strong the whole

...but is it safe?

Does the series need a rethink to lessen the danger level?

The championship-decider at California Speedway represented only the second time in eight years that the Indy Lights series had visited a superspeedway. The Lola T97/20 was more suitable than the previous year's car, thanks to greater structural integrity and, especially, a strengthened footbox. But late confirmation of the event, allied to the fact that several teams had already exhausted their budgets meant that the race attracted a season-low entry of 20 cars. The action, nevertheless, was frenetic, the field circulating in one large, snarling pack for almost half of the 50 laps.

Player's/Forsythe Racing team mate Lee Bentham scored a somewhat fortuitous victory at Gateway, his first-ever professional triumph, and added another pair of podium finishes during a solid rookie campaign. Those results were enough to restrict the best of the Americans, Chris Simmons, to sixth in the final championship standings. Simmons and Team Kool Green stablemate Mark Hotchkis were both fast on occasion during their second season of Indy Lights, but made too many mistakes and remained winless.

Clint Mears, on the other hand, scored two apparently effortless triumphs on the ovals at Milwaukee and Fontana. More frequently, his family-run car was found languishing towards the rear of the field; three times, indeed, he qualified stone-cold last, once again exemplifying how competitive the series has become in recent years. Japan's Hideki Noda became the seventh different winner when he guided Sal Incandela's Indy Regency Racing Lola expertly towards the chequered flag in treacherous conditions at Portland. ■

Virtually all of the drivers revelled in the thrill of the competition: 'That's what gets my blood pumping,' said race winner Clint (son of Rick) Mears. Crews and spectators, meanwhile, looked on with a mixture of awe and fear: 'It's incredible to watch,' said Formula 1 and CART veteran-turned-Indy Lights team owner Stefan Johansson, 'but it's an accident waiting to happen.'

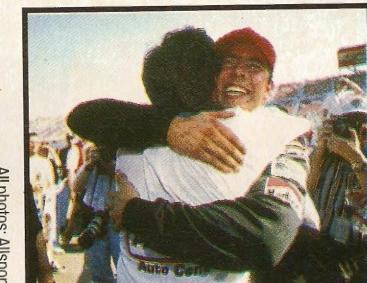
Sure enough, defending champion David Empringham,



Superspeedways...close as well as fast

All photos: AllsportUSA

Tony Kanaan kept his cool under pressure and saw off his friend, team mate and fellow countryman Helio Castro Neves in the title fight



Two victories for Rick Mears' son, Clint



Defending champion David Empringham staged a late-season surge to finish fourth

PPG/FIRESTONE INDY LIGHTS 1997

Pos	Driver (Nat)	Team	Wins	Poles	Points
1	Tony Kanaan (BR)	Tasman	3	4	156
2	Helio Castro Neves (BR)	Tasman	2	3	152
3	Cristiano da Matta (BR)	Brian Stewart	3	1	141
4	David Empringham (CDN)	Forsythe Racing	1	—	107
5	Lee Bentham (CDN)	Forsythe Racing	1	—	88
=	Chris Simmons (USA)	Team Kool Green	—	2	88
7	Mark Hotchkis (USA)	Team Kool Green	—	—	74
8	Clint Mears (USA)	Team Mears	2	2	53
9	Hideki Noda (J)	Indy Regency Racing	1	—	51
10	Christophe Tinseau (F)	Conquest Racing	—	—	49
=	Airton Daret (BR)	Brian Stewart	—	—	49

British Formula 3 veteran Brian Cunningham and rookie Casey Mears were involved in a frightening crash on lap 47. The incident happened when Cunningham inadvertently squeezed Empringham onto the 'apron' between Turns Three and Four. Mears, running a high line, was left with nowhere to go. All three Lolas made heavy contact with the wall, although, thankfully, none of the drivers was seriously hurt.

Empringham and Mears both pointed the finger of blame at Cunningham, with some justification, although in reality, with so many cars running so close together at such high speed, an accident was virtually inevitable. Consequently, for next year, series officials already are contemplating some changes.

'When we used to race at Pocono,' recalled team owner Brian Stewart, 'we ran only the main-plane wings front and rear, then balanced the car with Gurney flaps. If we did that now, the cars would be looser to drive, but it would place more of an emphasis on driver talent and less on speed.'

season. He did a very good job.'

So, too, did a third young Brazilian, Cristiano da Matta, who finished a close third in the final standings with the quickest of Brian Stewart Racing's three cars. Da Matta, who competed against Castro Neves not only in Brazilian karting and Formula 3, but also in British F3, endured a disappointing season of Formula 3000 before joining his compatriots in the United States. Not surprisingly, he struggled a little on the Homestead oval, but he proved to be a quick learner, finishing second in the next street course race at Long Beach and then speeding to a fine victory at the tricky Nazareth Speedway. Da Matta added two more wins at Vancouver and Laguna Seca and was left to rue the moment at Toronto when he ran out of fuel while running in second place. Still, he easily claimed Rookie of the Year honours and will be tough to beat in 1998 after switching across to the Tasman team.

David Empringham began the season with a tall order, aiming to become the first driver to defend an Indy Lights championship. He started with a handsome victory at Homestead, then faltered as he spun twice at Long Beach. The amiable Canadian crashed in practice at

Nazareth, whereupon he displayed his skills by rising from last on the grid to ninth. Empringham, curiously inconsistent in mid-season, recovered to finish fourth in the final table, eclipsing all but the trio of extraordinarily talented South Americans.

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Mark Higgins took the maiden British title for Formula 2 cars against huge opposition. By Henry Hope-Frost

It was billed as a new era of British Rallying – perhaps the most competitive domestic rally series in the world, and the perfect springboard to the World Rally Championship.

The 1997 Mobil 1-backed, five-round series certainly lived up to all expectations. An unprecedented number of marques, looking like a who's who of motor manufacturing, and some top class drivers committed their budgets and skills to putting on a great show in this, the first full year run to Formula 2 regulations.

Gone were four-wheel drive, turbo supercars, the likes of which Colin McRae, Carlos Sainz and Tommi Mäkinen were displaying on the world stage. Instead we had production-based, front-wheel drive, 2-litre machines whose high street appeal would push the promotional value of the series into orbit.

Anyone who thought the slashing of horsepower and grip, the muting of tree-felling anti-lag systems and the reduction in sheer spectacle would harm proceedings was quite wrong. The championship boasted reigning British champions, returning British champions and, indeed, reigning World champions. Between them they fought out a battle royal right down to the very last round. So intense was that battle, in fact, that a record five drivers went to the Isle of Man in September with a chance of the title.

Just who made the news during the 800-plus miles of some of rallying's toughest terrain?

Reigning champion Gwyndaf Evans spearheaded the Ford attack. For 1997 his trusty, Gordon Spooner-run 'Super' (later to become 'Maxi') Escort sported the new-look, kit-car package of increased power and steroid-induced aerodynamic tweaks. Indeed, all the front-runners, except Nissan, would campaign their

new kit-cars, scrapping any thoughts that these new generation 'production' cars looked tame.

For Evans it was again a competitive year, tainted only by accidents on the Pirelli and while running at the front of the title-deciding Manx. The pace of development caught the Blue Oval out at times, Evans struggling to make best use of the extra power and better handling afforded by kit-cars. Though rarely running out of the top three, Gwyndaf kept us all guessing as to whether he could emulate Colin McRae's back-to-back titles of '91-'92.

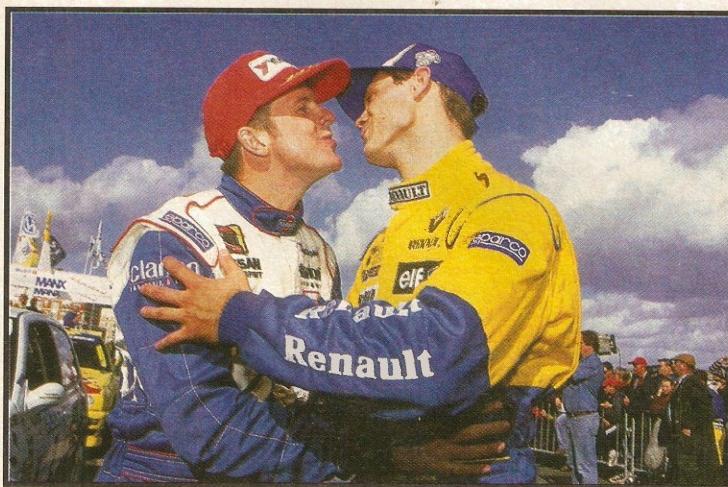
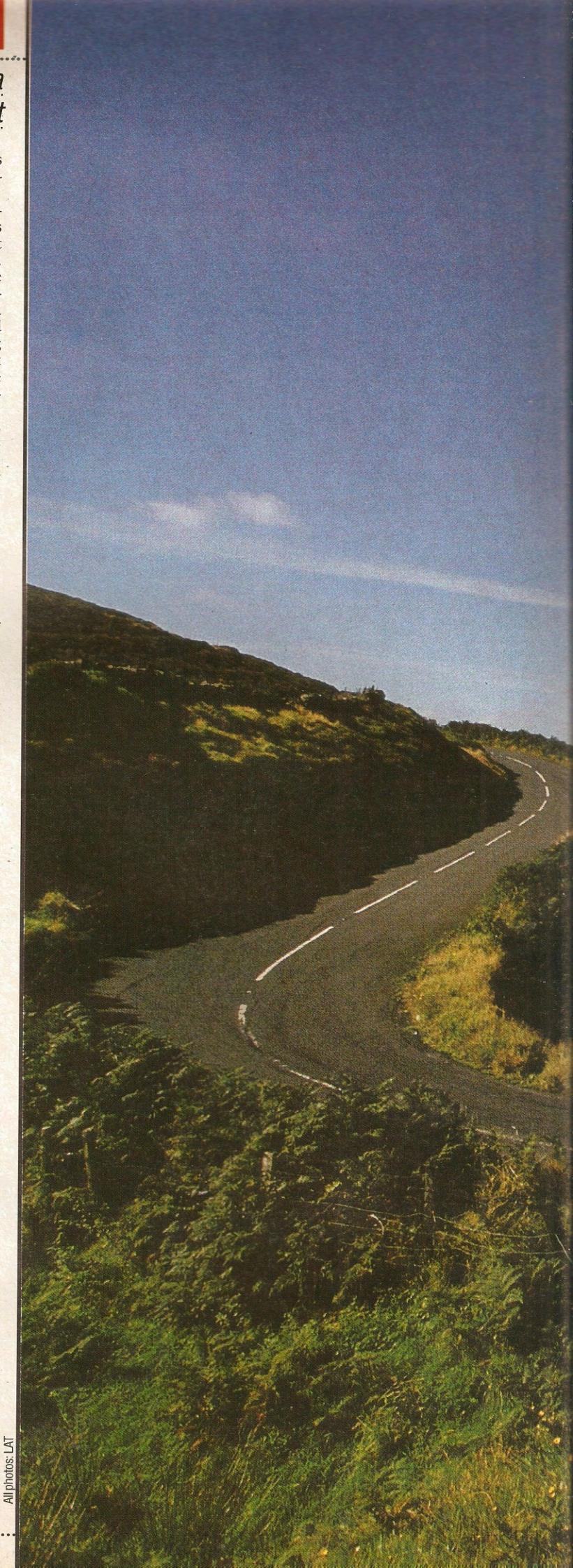
Nissan, for whom Mark Higgins had taken runner-up slot in the 1996 series, was back with its Sunny GTI. Although plans to introduce the new Almera kit-car at the season mid-point were scrapped, Higgins made rather good use of the car that had already carried Alister McRae to the

'95 title. The young Welshman overcame a lot of misfortune during the year, including a small 'off' in Wales that cost him a possible victory and an engine failure on the penultimate stage in Scotland, again robbing him of a sizeable haul of points.

He more than made up for the earlier disappointment, however, with a blinding drive on the Ulster tarmac that saw him rocket back into contention for the title as the series headed for its Manx showdown. Another strong drive there, despite a last-day scare when the Sunny landed heavily after a jump, saw him go one better on his runner-up slot of 1996 to take his first British title and Nissan's second in three years.

Volkswagen had lured Alister McRae to lead its two-car team of garish yellow Golfs. The Scot had endured an up and down '96 season as reigning champion, including two wins in a Malcolm Wilson-run Escort Cosworth, and an inauspicious ▶

"Anyone who thought the slashing of power and grip would harm proceedings was quite wrong."



All photos: LAT

Well done, love! Champ Mark Higgins and runner up Martin Rowe congratulate each other

You can in a Nissan



The top ten

1. MARK HIGGINS

No surprise that the champion gets my vote. The Manxman was quickest on 33 of the year's 93 special stages, 11 more than anyone else. Drove the Nissan with immense maturity – the only non-kit car front-runner remember. Took the crushing disappointment of penultimate stage engine failure in Scotland very well to blitz Ulster and take well-deserved title on the Manx.

**6. MARTIN ROWE**

'Well, he did come second in the championship, didn't he?' cries the defence. Yes, he did, and his drive 'at home' on the Manx was superb, but he was no match for team mate Head (particularly in the forests) for most of the year. In fact, Rowe took only 12 stage wins to Head's 22. Not a true measure of Martin's talent perhaps, but the 1998 season may well be.

**2. GWYNDAF EVANS**

Reigning champ was quick and consistent all year. Replacement 'Super/Maxi' Escort seemed a handful at times, but the 'wily old fox' kept his cool to score three top-three finishes, spoilt only by two accidents. More notable was his Manx 'off' while running at the head of the field.

**3. ALISTER McRAE**

Two great victories on the Welsh and Scottish gravel allowed the '95 champ a good lead in the series. His efforts on tarmac, however, where he was let down by the VW Golf, were fairly lacklustre. Like Evans, he spoilt his title hopes with a sizeable accident on the Isle of Man. Started well but lost impetus.

**4. ROBBIE HEAD**

A hot and cold year for the Scot. Surprising, but doubtless silencing gravel win on the Pirelli came at a good time. A mixture of reliability problems and accidents put a damper on his 14 out of 19 fastest times in Ulster.

**5. TAPIO LAUKKANEN**

The Finn slots in ahead of Martin Rowe because, over the course of the season, he did a better job against his more senior and experienced team mate (McRae) than Rowe (Head). Gutsy and determined drive in Scotland to set up last stage showdown with McRae one of the highlights of the year.

**8. STIG BLOMQVIST**

The fastest 50-year-old in the world, Stig is as quick as he ever was and stunned everyone with his third place on the Pirelli. If he'd had a 2-litre kit-car he would have given the youngsters a serious fright every time. It's just a pity he didn't do the whole year. We've always got the RAC to look forward to, though.

**9. DAVID HIGGINS**

British Group N champ and brother of Mark, David drove his turbocharged, four-wheel drive Subaru well all year. Four top 10 finishes in a production car was good going up against the new generation high-tech F2 cars. Deserves his works SEAT drive on the RAC and will go well.

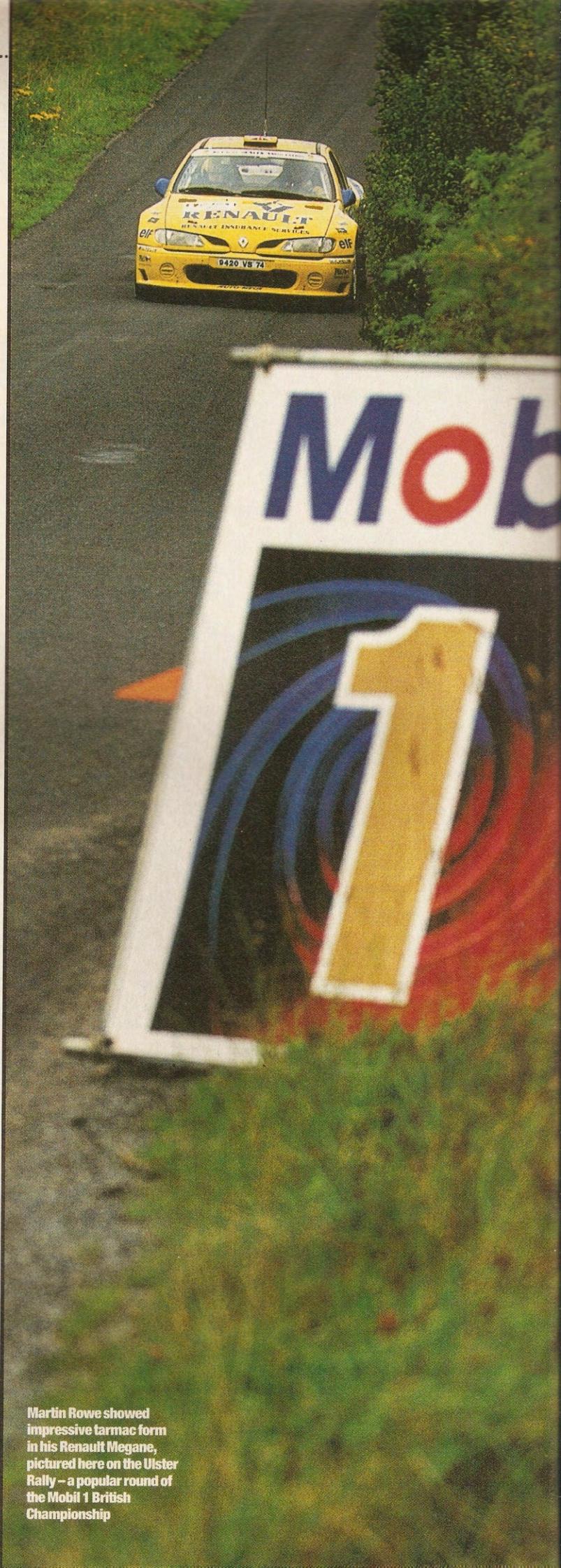
**10. DAVID MANN**

The only man to really challenge Higgins Jr on a consistent basis, the unassuming mushroom farmer was let down by reliability problems in the Proton. Fourth in Wales was his season highlight.



Koltzak/Sutton Images

Gwynnaf Evans's 'Super' and latterly 'Maxi' Escort looked good but was handful at times



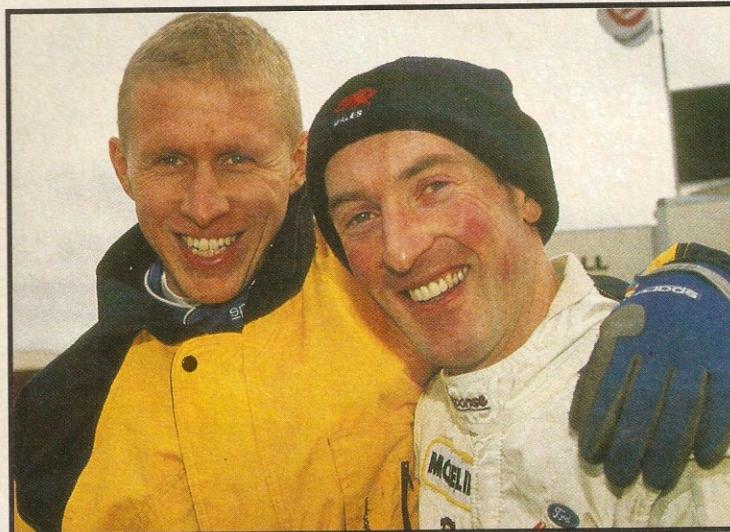
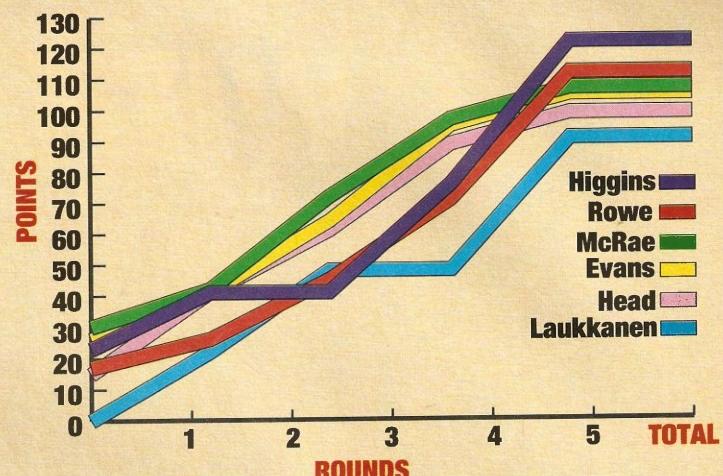
Martin Rowe showed impressive tarmac form in his Renault Megane, pictured here on the Ulster Rally – a popular round of the Mobil 1 British Championship

◀ debut at the wheel of the Golf GTI at the end of the year, but for '97 he was back for a serious attack with the German marque.

Alister, the youngest of the McRae rallying dynasty, was many people's favourite for a second title - if the Golf was up to the job. On the Welsh and Scottish gravel it clearly was, the Scot taking two great victories. Once the title race reached the tarmac of Northern Ireland, however, the Golf began to struggle. A lack of power brought only an eighth place, just enough to keep McRae in the title lead, but not enough to stop folk wondering whether he could hang on to it for long.

McRae was partnered in the SBG-run Golf squad by Finn Tapani Laukkonen, who showed a real turn of speed at times, a memorable last stage scrap with his more experienced team mate in Scotland one of

The battle for the title



Alister McRae and Gwyndaf Evans. Former champs who finished third and fourth this year

the highlights of the whole year.

Guest drives for Liam O'Callaghan in Ulster and Neil Simpson on the Manx were an attempt to cushion McRae's title advantage, but the Scot's own problems saw to it that their presence was largely irrelevant.

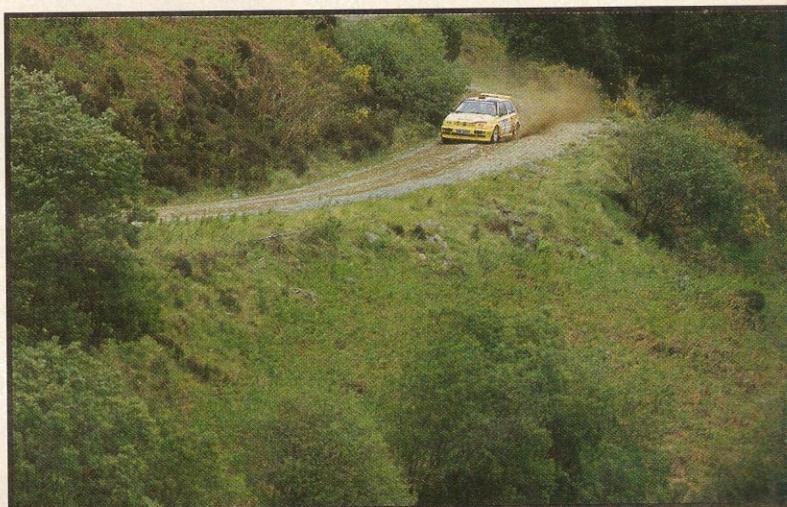
Adding colour to the line-up of manufacturers (in more ways than one) was SEAT. The Spanish-built, fluorescent yellow Ibizas were trying their hand at British rallying for the first time and certainly arrived with a reputation for getting the job done. As reigning 2-litre World Champions, it was feared that a few lessons would be learned by some of SEAT's rivals during the year. The lead Ibiza, when World Championship commitments allowed, was pedalled by Harri Rovanpera. He was very quick at times, but a fourth place in Scotland was the highest finish for the team all year, highlighting the competitiveness of the British series. The Finn had served notice of his intent in '96, when he won the Scottish outright in a Group N Mitsubishi, prompting many to suggest he was the next 'flying Finn.'

Rovanpera was backed up by Scotswoman Barbara Armstrong, who fought in vain to hold off the Simmonite sisters in the Ladies' Cup war. While Harri was off successfully defending SEAT's World F2 crown, and taking five class wins on the way, the UK-based Cupra Sport squad

recruited Irish tarmac ace Kenny McKinstry for the Ulster and the Manx rallies in an effort to close the gap on its rivals. McKinstry adapted well to the alien F2 environment (Kenny's definitely from the flame-spitting, tree-felling school), but not well enough to worry the establishment. The genial Irishman would be the first to admit that more miles in the car would have helped.

The team which aroused the most pre-season interest was Renault. The two potent, yellow and blue Maxi Meganes had already been seen on the championship trail, but had used 1996 as a deliberate practice session before the '97 regulations allowed kit-cars to score points. The Meganes didn't disappoint and lead driver Robbie Head, who had made a good impression in the F2 class in 1996, took a great, if a little fortunate, win on the Kielder gravel in April's Pirelli International. The Megane is renowned as a tarmac car, so a win on the loose certainly made one wonder what it could achieve on its favoured surface.

Head's team mate was a returning Martin Rowe. The Manxman had stunned the fraternity with fourth place on the '96 Manx in a one-off drive for VW, prompting many to single him out as a serious title threat. A slow start to the season saw Rowe drop behind the leading quartet in the points race, but a mature, end-of-season charge allowed him to ▶



Alister McRae took his VW Golf to fine victories on the gravel in Wales and (here) Scotland



Mark Higgins, celebrating with co-driver Phil Mills, claimed his maiden British series win on the penultimate round in Ulster – the catalyst to his title

rocket right back into contention, earning a place in the quintet of champions-elect for the Manx. That he eventually took the runner-up slot was more than a little ironic. In fact, he damn well nearly won the title. Had Mark Higgins's awkward landing been as serious as he believed it to be, Rowe would have done it. As it was, runner-up plus a great home win to round off his first year with the Regie was good stuff. More will be expected of Rowe next year, especially in the forests.

With the big five making most of the headlines, it was left to the 'little' teams to follow on behind. Skoda scored a major coup by announcing '83 British and '84 World Champion Stig Blomqvist would lead the 1600cc Felicia team. With a car losing 400cc to its rivals, 50-year-old Blomqvist would need to call on all his vast experience and skill to bag competitive stage times. For a man

who last won this title when the likes of Higgins, McRae and Rowe still needed a lollipop lady to cross the road, Stig did not disappoint. Third overall on the Pirelli was the team's staggering best – in fact, equalling its best ever result in Britain, the Swede taking the same result on the '96 snow-affected RAC Rally. It was more than a pity that Stig was committed to the Swedish Touring Car series for Ford, and thus missed Scotland and Ulster. The clashing events were a chance for Czech rally stars Jaroslav Stary and Jindrich Stofka to uphold family honour. Both acquitted themselves well with good class wins.

Peugeot awarded its 1996 Junior champion Justin Dale with the '97 works drive. Dale took an excellent third overall in the championship last year and scooped the junior title. Now with a 2-litre 306 at his disposal, he regularly knocked on the top 10 door, often upsetting more ►

A new dawn

British series top dog John Horton insists Formula 2 is the way to go



The first full season to Formula 2 rules saw a positive response from the manufacturers

The advent of Formula 2 (2-litre, front-wheel drive) as the dominant formula at the beginning of this year was met with much criticism and mirth – to begin with at least.

Championship organiser and prime mover John Horton takes up the story: 'The 2-litre championship was not welcomed by the majority. What we needed to do was convince the manufacturers that it was an attractive long-term proposition. They had to be willing and capable of committing to the cause.'

It seems Horton was spot on with his perceptions, for 1997 saw the most competitive British series for years. The statistics are there for all to see. Added to that, the recent announcement that Vauxhall will return to a category and Malaysian car maker Proton will run a development car in '98, proves the manufacturers must think it's a good thing.

Success, as they say, breeds success. With the British series now a suitable springboard to the World Championship, there is a risk that

some of its leading drivers and teams may make that jump, thus depleting the numbers. Horton is confident, though: 'If we lose teams and drivers to the World Championship, it shows the domestic series in a good light. As long as we attract new makes in their place we'll be alright.'

With Peugeot already running a suitable car, the F2 306 Maxi, on the World stage and Citroen poised to hit the big time soon (see Special Stage), his prayers could be answered.

What are the plans for 1998 and beyond? 'My aim for '98 is to attract more investment and new promotional ideas. We already have the double-header format that ran extremely well on the Pirelli. The idea of two scoring events for the cost of one rally is appealing, especially to the amateur crews that make up the backbone of this championship.'

Horton does admit, though, that people often accuse him of running a three ring circus. His answer is adamant: 'I've been there, seen it, done it, won it, lost it and crashed it – so I know how it works.'



Pre-season favourite Robbie Head won the Pirelli for Renault – but couldn't wrest the title



SEAT added colour and class to the events, although lead driver Harri Rovanpera contested just three rounds due to clashing World Championship duties

◀ powerful cars. A final position of seventh indicates that with more experience and with more development to come from the Coventry crew, Dale and Peugeot should mix it with the big boys next year.

Honda was represented with a singleton entry for Neil Wearden. The potent Civic, like the Skoda a 1600cc car, was run for the ex-junior Peugeot man by Asquith. With a top-10 finish in Wales the only reward for their efforts, Wearden struggled to make much of an impact in his first year aboard the Japanese car. With faster machinery and a little more controlled aggression he will get back on terms with old sparring part-



Stig: An old viking meets... an old viking!

ner Justin Dale to resume their 'battle of the youngsters.' With a second overall against mightier machinery in June's Goodwood rallysprint partnered by yours truly, there's enough evidence to suggest I'm not wrong.

There were many outspoken critics of British Championship rallying and its new dawn at the start of 1997. Predictably so to begin with, because people don't like change, none more so than those who drove four-wheel drive turbo cars. But they were told it was time to weed out the old and bring in the new. With a good promotional identity and regulation stability, 2-litre, front-wheel drive rallycars would be good, said the

rule-makers. In fact, they grossly underestimated the situation. Who would have predicted that five men would go to the series's last event all with a shot at title glory? That it was only decided in the last few minutes of the last day was testament to the rule makers' assertion that all was not lost by banning the big-bangers.

It didn't matter whether you were in Wales, Cumbria, Scotland, Ireland or on the Isle of Man, the British Rally Championship left a lasting impression. The competition was better than anyone dared imagine and left all who competed, watched and organised wanting more. Next year, they're sure to get it. ■

MOBIL 1 BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP 1997

Pos	Driver (Nat)	Car	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total
1	Mark Higgins (GB)	Nissan Sunny GTI	23	13	5	0	35	36	10	122
2	Martin Rowe (GB)	Renault Maxi Megane	17	9	0	19	26	40	10	112
3	Alister McRae (GB)	Volkswagen Golf GTI	30	2	10	30	25	0	10	107
4	Gwynneth Evans (GB)	Ford Super/Maxi Escort	26	15	0	23	31	0	10	105
5	Robbie Head (GB)	Renault Maxi Megane	15	11	15	20	28	0	10	99
6	Tapio Laukkonen (SF)	Volkswagen Golf GTI	0	10	12	26	0	33	10	91
7	Justin Dale (GB)	Peugeot 306 S16	0	3	10	18	23	27	10	91
8	Stephanie Simonite (GB)	Ford Escort	13	2	7	16	22	26	10	87
9	Philip Young (GB)	Ford Escort	20	4	0	0	21	29	10	84
10	Steve Wedgbury (GB)	Skoda Felicia	19	5	4	0	15	22	10	75
11	Don Whitehurst (GB)	Vauxhall Nova	12	7	5	14	16	19	10	71
12	Ashley Blenkiron (GB)	Volkswagen Golf GTI	0	0	0	17	17	24	10	68
13	Wayne Sisson (GB)	Vauxhall Astra	4	0	3	12	19	21	10	66
14	Stuart Egglestone (GB)	Vauxhall Astra	18	5	9	0	18	0	10	60
15	Robert Watson (GB)	Honda Civic VTi	5	0	1	0	14	23	10	54
16	Les Andrew (GB)	Vauxhall Astra	1	0	0	11	11	20	10	53
17	Barbara Armstrong (GB)	SEAT Ibiza Kit-Car	10	0	6	0	0	25	10	51
18	Stig Blomqvist (S)	Skoda Felicia	0	9	13	DNE	DNE	28	-	50
19	Julian Reynolds (GB)	Ford Escort	DNE	8	9	0	DNE	31	-	48
20	Justin Northage (GB)	Vauxhall Astra	DNE	0	0	13	13	18	-	44

Rounds 1, Vauxhall Rally of Wales, March 14-15; **2 & 3**, Pirelli International, April 26-27; **4**, RSAC Scottish International, June 6-7; **5**, Stena Line Ulster International, August 1-2; **6**, Manx International, September 11-13. Round 7 was a 10-point bonus for drivers who contested every round. DNE= did not enter. Scoring system - Round 1 (Wales), 30-26-23-21-20-19-18-17-16-15 etc; Round 2 (Pirelli-day one), 15-13-11-10-10-9-8-8-7-7-6-6-5-5-4-4-3-3-2-1-etc; Round 3 (Pirelli-day two).

15-13-12-11-10-10-9-8-8-7-7-6-6-5-5-4-4-3-3-2-2-1etc; Round 4 (Scotland), as for Wales; Round 5 (Ulster), 35-31-28-26-25-24-23-22-21-20 etc; Round 6 (Manx), 40-36-33-31-30-29-28-27-26-25 etc.



Justin Dale did a good job in the works Peugeot 306 S16 and should go better still in '98



Challenger the established

Four teams chose a tough '97 season to make their F3 debut. James Baker reports on how they fared

If the number of teams entering a series is a good barometer of its success, then the AUTOSPORT British Formula 3 Championship was in particularly rude health this season.

The beginning of the new engine regulations were seen as a good time to join in, given that a lack of experience would be less of a disadvantage.

An almost unprecedented four teams jumped in to challenge the ranks of the established and experienced runners. All had reasons to be confident, but at the end of an extraordinarily competitive season, each had learned a significant lesson.

The quartet - Martin Donnelly Racing, Carlin Motorsport, Portman Racing and MRS - arrived with varying levels of experience, and their respective seasons have provided a fascinating insight into what is required to succeed in F3.

The only outfit to have stepped up from the junior formulae was MDR, and the fact that its staff were already

a tightly knit and well-oiled unit proved decisive, as it took two victories. The other thing that set the Norfolk outfit apart was that it had two drivers in the experienced Mark Shaw and the highly-rated Brazilian Mario Haberfeld. 'I knew we had to have two drivers,' says Donnelly. 'Mark's experience was essential, because he knew what an F3 car really should feel like and he stopped us going down some blind alleys on set-up. As for Mario, I believe he was certainly the best of the drivers the new teams had.'

It's true to say that Haberfeld played no small part in the team's success. The 21-year-old chose MDR because, when testing with various teams, he had been most comfortable in the chassis Peter Berry, then at Fortec, had engineered. When Berry went to MDR, the Brazilian followed, and the two struck up an immediate rapport. In fact, Donnelly cites it as the single most important factor in his team's success. 'The rela-



Martin Donnelly and Mario Haberfeld formed perhaps the best new partnership of '97

tionship Peter and Mario formed was crucial,' reflects the Ulsterman. 'Mario respected Peter before he came to MDR, and that meant we could get down to work very early.'

Having overcome an initial tendency to overcomplicate the set-up, Haberfeld responded well to a simple chassis setting and perhaps could have won earlier in the year had he not had bad luck with the weather. 'Everyone said I was only fast in testing,' moaned Mario. 'But every time I

was fastest in the dry test, the race would be very wet, and we struggled to find a good wet set-up.'

If Donnelly got the package right, the others most certainly did not, initially anyway. The reasons were varied. One problem was that although they all wanted a second driver, with no pedigree, no one was prepared to risk their money on an unknown quantity. While Carlin Motorsport came closest to having a history - its core being made up of

LAWRENCE/Sutton Images
Henry Stanton found his season with Carlin Motorsport ruined by illness and a subsequent lack of consistency

Trevor Carlin and Bruce Carey, who had been together at Bowman and West Surrey Racing - the Portman team was entirely new, and initially it showed.

With a background in Formula 1, Portman underestimated the difficulties of competing in F3, and with MCLAREN/AUTOSPORT BRDC Young Driver Darren Turner also new, they struggled to find their feet. 'The early part of the season reflected unfairly on both Darren and the team,' said Warren Hughes, who eventually replaced Turner. 'It's almost suicidal for a new team to come into F3 with a rookie driver. He's finding his way, and the last thing he needs is a team that's unsure, because neither knows what's right or wrong.'

Chief engineer Paul White's leaving after the first race was probably the best thing that could have happened, as it flagged up the technical weakness in the team; TWR F3 engineer Russell Eacott and Indycar technical consultant Alan Mertens were duly brought in.

For Turner, though, it was too late. Portman needed results in a hurry and veteran F3 star Hughes was called up for his huge experience. 'When I went there they were a little unsure of themselves,' he pointed out. 'But the progress we made was dramatic. They just needed someone

to click everything into place, which I feel I did.'

By the year's end, Warren was the fastest of the HKS Mitsubishi-powered Dallaras, and a pair of sixth places in the final two races was scant reward.

Carlin also came on strong late in the season. The team's strength was that they had all worked together

"The last thing a new driver in F3 needs is a team that's unsure"

WARREN HUGHES

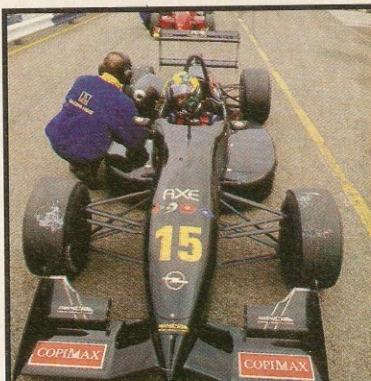
before at WSR, and team boss Trevor Carlin believes that it was this experience which helped them cope during the dark months when others would have crumbled. What Carlin had thrown at it was a series of shunts and illnesses to driver Henry Stanton that prevented him building any kind of consistency and confidence. In fact, he failed to start seven

times. F3 supersub Jamie Spence deputised on four occasions and scored a fifth place at Snetterton that gave arguably the most promising and underestimated team in the pit lane something to cheer. 'For what it's worth we were quickest in the final qualifying session of the year,' says Carlin of Spence's Thruxton wet time.

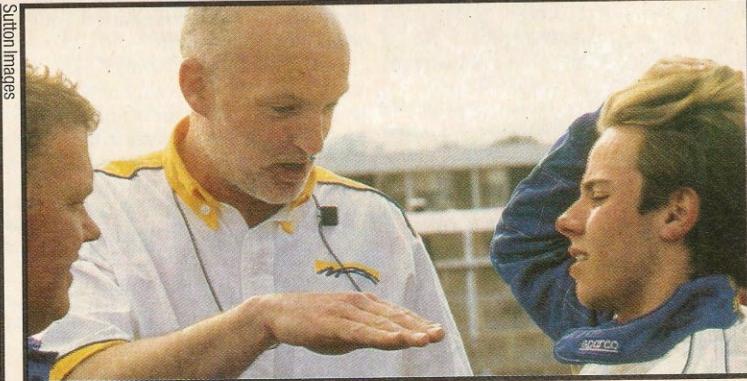
The team which crumbled was MRS. 'That was one of the great unsolved mysteries of the season,' says Martin Donnelly, 'because they had all the kit to do the job, and Paul Heath is a good engineer.' Having been built around Brazilian Formula Vauxhall graduate Ricardo Mauricio, the team initially showed well with a fifth at Thruxton in round three. But teenager was never comfortable in the car and confidence is something the São Paulista needs to deliver his best.

Five races is not really a fair crack of the whip, but the team decided to cut its losses and Mauricio went off to TOM'S GB. 'The results were not what we would have wished,' said team manager Roberto Costa.

Ultimately, the various highs and lows of the quartet proves that success only comes when the whole package works together - although if the driver is really on form, it can sometimes drag the rest of the team in to line. ■



Mario Haberfeld took MDR to the victory circle



Engineer Paul Heath and Ricardo Mauricio were unable to prevent MRS from going down

Mick Walker



Portman Racing's season improved when it called up the experienced Warren Hughes

Second-year itch

Speedsport found it tough to maintain their fine debut form of '96

In 1996, the Speedsport team was the new kid on the Formula 3 block and, like Martin Donnelly Racing this season, it tasted victory champagne at the British Grand Prix support race. But this year the Silverstone-based outfit had a torrid season, leaving team boss Mike O'Brien frequently shaking his head in frustration on more than one occasion.

'It doesn't get any easier after the first year,' he points out philosophically. 'We arrived last season with a team that had been together for three years and were quick from the word go. That early confidence boost was really important. We kept the set-up simple and more often than not we got it right.'



Manning had a nightmare second year

This season, though, O'Brien claims the new Dallara, driven by Darren Manning, has made life more difficult. 'The car is much more sensitive to set-up, especially on new tyres,' he explains. 'and because we have been tight on finance we haven't been able to do much testing. With the official tests being shortened, and the '96 settings not working, we have struggled to find a good set-up.'

When we have, it has been on old tyres, and when we reach the race and put on new tyres the set-up is wrong.

'The Dallara has been almost impossible this year, although it often feels okay. That may explain why MRS never really got it together. It's been a hard year to come in to F3.'

G-Force rises in east to win Zhuhai GT race

The British G-Force team scored its first international win, but it was made to fight. Damien Smith reports

With only two GT1 cars entered for the non-championship International GT race at Zhuhai, the British G-Force team could have been forgiven had they expected an easy time during the 3-hour endurance evening race. But drivers John Greasley, Geoff Lister and Magnus Wallinder needed a slice of luck to race back into contention to take the team's first international win.

G-Force's Porsche 911 GT1 was clearly the class of the field, taking pole by 2.3s. But the car alongside it on the front row was a surprise, with Cor Euser's Marcos LM600 second and leading the GT2 runners, which included Roock Racing's Claudia Hurtgen/Stephane Ortelli Porsche and the Franz Konrad/Nick Ham Konrad Porsche. The other GT1 entry, a 1995-spec McLaren F1, was fifth with Jean-Luc Maury-Laribière and, supposedly,

Ron Atapattu. Come the race, former Formula 3000 star Emmanuel Clerico had replaced the American. Greasley had started from pole and held the early lead, but it didn't take long for Clerico to reach him at the front, the Frenchman diving inside the British driver to begin to build a lead. As Greasley fell to fourth by the end of his stint behind Hurtgen and Konrad, Clerico's lead was almost half a minute - and he claimed to have backed off because of rising water temperature.

Clerico handed over to Maury-Laribière after Greasley had been replaced by Lister, but the owner of the McLaren blew any chance of making the most of Clerico's work. 'I had a gearbox problem which forced me to spin on my first lap at the final corner,' he explained, 'but I was able to live with it.'

As the McLaren fell out of contention, Ham was left in the lead, having come out best from the pitstops after taking over from Konrad. But a wild spin cost him time, handing the lead to the rapid Ortelli, who would stay in the Roock Porsche until the end.

As darkness fell, the GT2 car held off Lister's GT1 Porsche, and Ortelli actually managed to stretch his advantage. But then Samson Chan hit the wall exiting a corner, and the second Roock car was destroyed by the ensuing fire, which looked very dramatic in the darkness. Chan escaped uninjured but he left a big mess behind him and the safety car was called upon. Once the safety car picked up the leader, something that took far too many laps, the debris had been almost cleaned up and the race restarted. Surprisingly, neither Ortelli nor Lister chose to make their stops during the safety car period, G-Force in particular suffering by keeping to its schedule. Unfortunately, the lap it decided to

pit was the one when the racing restarted.

Wallinder rejoined well over a minute down on Ortelli, with Euser just ahead of him. His team-mate Pim van Liet had made steady progress, but Euser took the car into a strong position in his double stint and looked good for a podium finish. In the G-Force Porsche, Wallinder was working hard and he flew, setting the race's fastest lap. He soon demoted Euser and took 2s chunks out of Ortelli's lead.

The Swede was rewarded for his efforts when Ortelli was forced to pit for a 'splash-and-dash', the Frenchman rejoining just 4s down on the GT1 car. But Wallinder soon edged clear. It seemed, though, that Ortelli and Hurtgen would be rewarded with second overall and first in GT2, but Roock's bad luck struck again as their engine - a new one for this race - let go with just minutes left.

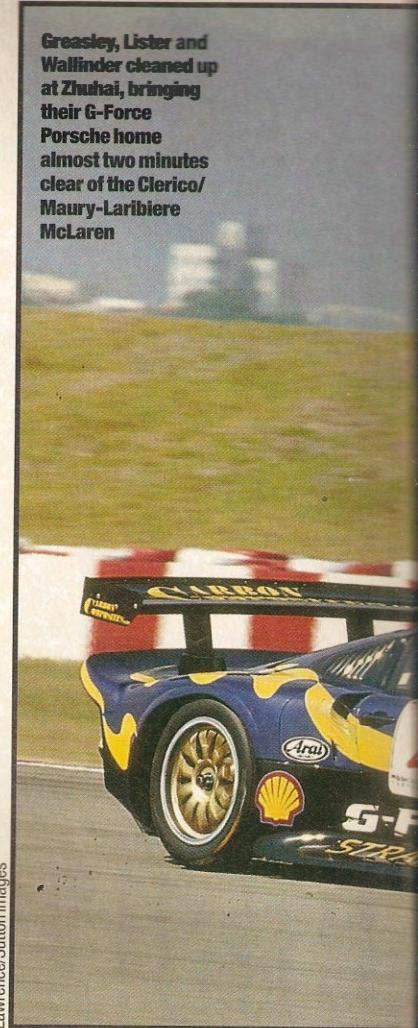
Just before Ortelli pulled off, Euser had been forced to pit because of worn brake pads. 'I tried to go the distance on the old ones, but they were right down to the metal,' he explained.

These misfortunes handed second to the other GT1 car, with early pace-setter Clerico bringing the McLaren home. Meanwhile, Konrad and Ham benefitted most from their rivals' problems by taking third as first GT2 car home.

MARLBORO CHINA INTERNATIONAL GT RACE, ZHUHAI (PRC), 3 HOURS/99 LAPS - 265.76 MILES, NOV 9

1 John Greasley/Geoff Lister/Magnus Wallinder (Porsche 911 GT1), 3h00m20.75s, 88.41mph; 2 Jean-Luc Maury-Laribière/Emmanuel Clerico (McLaren F1), 3h02m10.09s; 3 Franz Konrad/Nick Ham (Porsche 911 GT2), 97 laps; 4 Cor Euser/Pim van Liet (Marcos LM600), 96; 5 Matt Turner/John Williams (Chrysler Viper GTS-R), 93; 6 Eric Graham/Michel Faraut/David Smadja (Porsche 911 GT2), 92; 7 Claudia Hurtgen/Stephane Ortelli (Porsche 911 GT2), 91; 8 Jean-Pierre Malcher/Patrice Goueslard (Porsche 911 GT2), 91; 9 Jacques Corbet/Andrew Bagnall/Peter Seikel (Porsche 911 GT2), 91; 10 Han Graf/Ben Lieren/Reinhold Schelle (Porsche 911 RSR), 89. **Fastest lap** Wallinder, 1m34.72s, 102.02mph. **Class winners** - GT1 Greasley/Lister/Wallinder. GT2 Konrad/Ham. GT3 Graf/Lieren/Schelle.

Greasley, Lister and Wallinder cleaned up at Zhuhai, bringing their G-Force Porsche home almost two minutes clear of the Clerico/Maury-Laribière McLaren



Lawrence/Sutton Images

Racing in the dark

A thin field was nothing next to the fun of running after sunset

With its non-championship status, and following straight after the final two races of the FIA GT series, Zhuhai was always going to struggle for a strong grid. But the Chinese did their best to make their second big motorsport event of '97, after the China Rally, as exciting as possible.

Making the three-hour race start at 1700, which meant two-thirds of the race would be run in darkness, probably seemed a good idea at the time. But it actually created some rather large problems.

Firstly, the Lamborghini Diablos which were due to run in GT3 to bolster the field, were faced with the prospect of racing in darkness without headlights. In the end, only three Diablos started the race with their fog lights on, but the whole thing was something of a joke.

Secondly, the race was to be transmitted live. The problem is, night racing makes for some pretty lousy television.

There were other problems for the teams to face, like their cars turning up very late, having been held at the port, and dramas with fuel supply. Though the attitude of the Chinese is refreshing, as they learn about the most capitalist sport of them all, it can also become a little trying!

Lawrence/Sutton Images



Darkness fell at Zhuhai and there were still two hours of the three-hour race to go...

Kwan claims two at Zhuhai

Charles Kwan decisively won the South East Asian Touring Car Zone Challenge at Zhuhai with clear wins in both races.

Much of the drama occurred before the start, or at least before the restart, as the first attempt ended at the first corner when four cars crashed, blocking the course. When the cars returned to the grid, Ratanakul Prutirat's Nissan caught fire. Then, after the smoke cleared, another set of accidents followed.

Although the race continued, the lead group broke clear as they didn't have to take avoiding action, and Kwan led throughout, with Prutirat the only driver to stay with him. The win gave Kwan the title.

Kwan then led all the way in the second race, again followed by Prutirat, with Henry Lee Jr storming from 22nd on the grid to third.

● Russ Swinnerton

SOUTH EAST ASIAN TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP, ROUNDS 13 & 14 OF 16, ZHUHAI (PRC), 2 x 10 LAPS - 2 x 26.84 MILES, NOV 8/9,
Race 1 1 Charles Kwan (BMW 320i), 17m55.16s, 89.88mph; 2 Ratanakul Prutirat (Nissan Primera), 17m59.11s; 3 Chan Chi Wah (BMW 318iS), 19m05.11s; 4 Danny Stacy Chau (Toyota Carina), 9 laps; etc. **Division 2** 1 Cheung Hoo Kong (Toyota Corolla). **Race 2** 1 Kwan, 17m53.21s, 90.05mph; 2 Prutirat, 18m01.61s; 3 Henry Lee Jr (Vauxhall Cavalier), 18m01.96s; 4 Chi Wah, 19m15.56s; etc. **Division 2** 1 Brian Whillcock (Toyota Corolla). **Championship positions** 1 Kwan, 245pts; 2 Prutirat, 169; 3 Kasikam Suphot, 158.

Courage pays off

The Ferrari challenge came to nothing when the final International Sports Racing Series round of the year was held at Jarama, allowing Frenchmen Didier Cottaz and Jerome Policand to race to glory in their Courage.

Gremlins in qualifying were at the root of the problems suffered by the pair of Ferraris, with the Pilote Racing 333SP failing to fire up and the Horag Hotz Racing 333SP missing out due to a gearbox problem as the Cottaz/Policand Courage claimed pole.

Then Freddy Lienhard ran off the circuit in the Horag Hotz 333SP as he tried to avoid a four-car melee ahead of him on the opening lap. Christophe Bouchut was among these, and also speared off the track, but he was able to keep going in his Kremer K8, while his sister car called in to the pits for repairs.

Lienhard was not so lucky, as his Ferrari was left without drive and he was out on the spot.

Cottaz was thus delighted when he came around at the end of the first lap, not only to be three lengths clear but also to see the Ferrari parked up. And then he simply pulled into the distance, with Policand extending the advantage when he took over for the second hour. 'The car was perfect today,' said Cottaz. 'I was disappointed to see the Ferrari was off, as I wish we could have raced against them as I

think we had the car to beat them this weekend.'

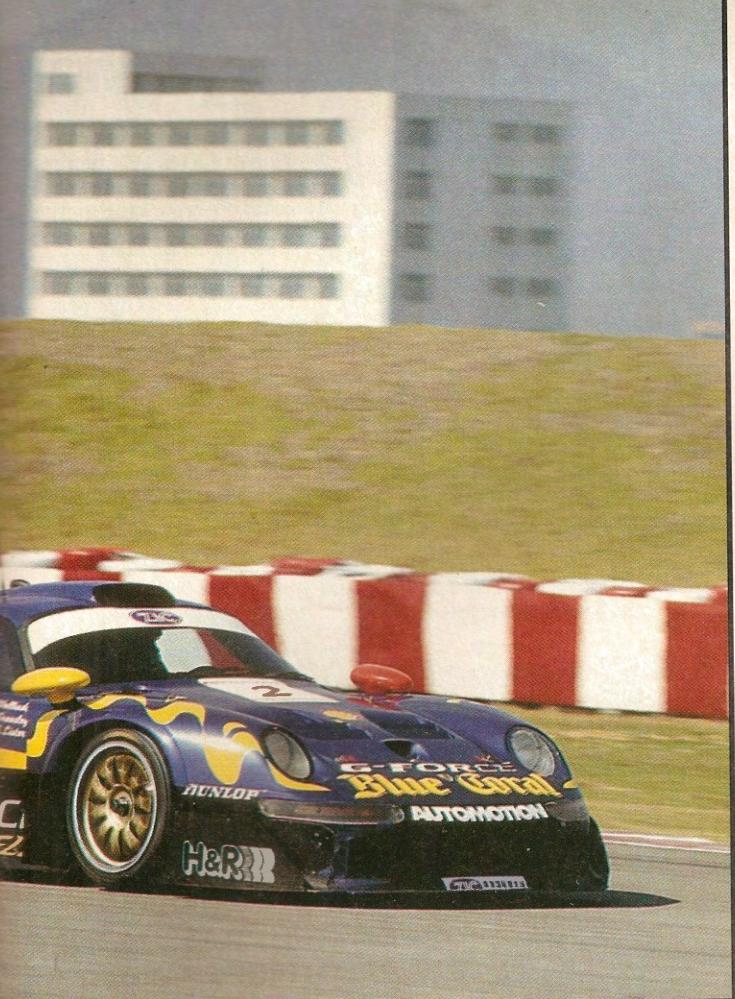
Second place went to the Class 2 Centenari-Alfa driven by Arturo Merzario and Robin Donovan, finishing two laps down on the race winners, but a lap ahead of the Bouchut/Carl Rosenblad Kremer.

The best battle of the race was between the SCI Spice-Ferrari of Raniero Randaccio and Robbie Stirling, the Kremer shared by Alfonso d'Orleans and Tomas Saldana and the two Debora, with Herve Regout and David Dussau taking their LMP 296 to fourth place.

INTERNATIONAL SPORTS RACING SERIES, ROUND 4 OF 4, JARAMA (E), 2 HOURS/77 LAPS - 184.18 MILES, NOV 9 1 Didier Cottaz/Jerome Policand (Courage-Porsche C41), 2h00m53.40s, 91.41mph; 2 Arturo Merzario/Robin Donovan (Centenari-Alfa), 75 laps; 3 Christophe Bouchut/Carl Rosenblad (Kremer-Porsche K8), 74; 4 David Dussau/Herve Regout (Debora-Ford LMP 296), 71; 5 Boccardi/Patrice Roussel (Debora-BMW LMP 297), 71; 6 Jean-Louis Ricci/Jean-Francois Yvon (Courage-Porsche C36), 71; etc.



Cottaz and Policand had a dream outing



Hermanto is Asian champ

Marlboro Castrol Meritus team drivers Ng Wai Leong and Bagoes Hermanto produced the Asian Formula 2000 action of the season in the double-header at Zhuhai. And although Wai Leong won both, 16-year-old Indonesian Hermanto took the title.



Hermanto & Wai Leong

Malaysian driver Wai Leong turned his first pole into a fine first win. However, Hermanto made him work for it and passed him at the end of the straight. Then Wai Leong went back ahead two corners later. Hermanto regained the lead on lap three and it took Wai Leong until the final lap to hit the front again.

Hermanto led from pole in the second race. Wai Leong moved ahead on lap nine and Hermanto pulled off with a flat battery, leaving Wai Leong to win from Alex Li.

• Russ Swinnerton

ASIAN FORMULA 2000 CHAMPIONSHIP, ROUNDS 11 & 12 OF 14, ZHUHAI (PRC), 2x10 LAPS - 2 x 26.84 MILES, NOV 9, Race 1 1 Ng Wai Leong, 17m59.40s, 89.53mph; 2 Bagoes Hermanto, 17m59.78s; 3 Brian Whillock, 18m07.93s; 4 James Chia, 18m19.17s; etc. **Race 2** 1 Wai Leong, 17m59.07s, 89.56mph; 2 Alex Li, 18m28.97s; 3 Ringo Chong, 18m36.64s; 4 Whillock, 18m46.17s; etc.

Morris blasts to the Australian title

Paul Morris avenged his Bathurst 1000 disqualification by winning the Australian Super Touring Championship and the final race of the eight-round series at Sydney's Amaroo Park circuit.

The victory was made even sweeter for Morris, coming on a circuit which is regarded as the rival Audi team's private province - Brad Jones has won the previous six races there - and with his team-mate Geoff Brabham winning the first heat.

This was Morris's second Super Touring title in three years, reclaiming the title from Jones.

The two 29-lap races on the tight and undulating circuit were marred

by a spate of accidents. The first race was stopped twice, the first time when Kiwi Tony Newman flipped his Peugeot. The pace car came out for four laps before racing resumed, then Mike Fitzgerald was lucky to escape serious injury when his Peugeot collided with the lapping Audi of Jones. The 405 hit a bank and was engulfed in flames as it spun through the air. Fitzgerald was taken to hospital with bruises and cuts, but X-rays revealed no broken bones.

Brabham, the only driver going into the race with a chance of wresting the title from Morris, won the first race, with Jones managing to finish second, despite the crash

incident, and his team-mate Cameron McConville was third.

However, Brabham could manage only third place in the second heat, with the consistent McConville finishing second.

Morris was in the box seat for the championship going into the final round, and took the title with a fourth placing in heat one and the victory in the second race.

After the carnage of the first race, seven laps of the second race were lost under the pace car when privateers Blair Smith and David Auger crashed after Smith's car was tapped by Bob Tweedie's Cavalier.

Jones, running second to Morris, was making ground after the pace car pulled in, but stopped two laps from the finish with gearbox failure. Thus McConville claimed second place ahead of Brabham.

• Bob Jennings



Paul Morris won the second race to claim his second Australian Super Touring title

AUSTRALIAN SUPER TOURING CHAMPIONSHIP, ROUND 8 OF 8, AMAROO PARK (AUS), 29 & 31 LAPS - 36.04 & 38.53 MILES, NOV 9, Heat 1 1 Geoff Brabham (BMW 320i), 33m09.02s, 65.23mph; 2 Brad Jones (Audi A4), 33m11.56s; 3 Cameron McConville (Audi A4), 33m14.15s; 4 Paul Morris (BMW 320i), 33m18.74s; 5 Craig Baird (BMW 320i), 33m22.56s; 6 Jim Richards (Volvo 850), 33m38.71s. **Heat 2** 1 Morris, 35m50.06s, 64.51mph; 2 McConville, 35m54.00s; 3 Brabham, 33m55.67s; 4 Baird, 35m56.60s; 5 Richards, 36m09.40s; 6 Tony Scott (Volvo 850), 30 laps. **Final championship positions** 1 Morris, 191pts; 2 Brabham, 171; 3 McConville, 155; 4 Jones, 126; 5 Jim Richards, 111; 6 McLean, 67; etc. **Manufacturers** 1 BMW, 220; 2 Audi, 194; 3 Volvo, 158.



Ichiro Tsuboi

Pedro de la Rosa was in a class of his own yet again, scoring his sixth Formula Nippon win of the season for the Nova Engineering team

De la Rosa does it again

Formula Nippon champion already, Pedro de la Rosa rounded off in style

Pedro de la Rosa can do no wrong in Japan. Despite being the Formula Nippon champion already, the Spaniard turned out for the final round at Suzuka, qualified his Nova Lola on pole and won by 13 seconds.

De la Rosa led away, with Takuya Kurosawa, Masahiko Kageyama and Masami Kageyama tucking in behind his yellow machine.

Toranosuke Takagi should have been up there too, having qualified third, but he stalled on the parade lap and had to start from the rear of the grid in his Nakajima Planning Reynard. And he instantly set about making up lost ground.

Also on the move was Juchi Wakisaka, who started 10th in the lone Dome, but was up to eighth at

the end of the first lap, then seventh after lap two. He then engaged in a good battle with Michael Krumm and Katsumi Yamamoto, but this ended in tears at the chicane when Wakisaka and Yamamoto tangled eight laps from the finish.

By this time, Takagi was up to seventh. He then passed Tetsuya Tanaka and Krumm, the German slowed by gearbox troubles.

Out front, though, no-one could do anything about de la Rosa and he went on to win easily from Kurosawa, with Kurosawa thus finishing the year as runner-up.

There was then a gap back to the Kageyama brothers and an even larger gap back to Takagi. Marco Apicella worked his way up to sixth, but hit debris and fell to eighth.

Ralph Firman leapt from 13th to

seventh, but fell back to 11th as his handling went off, while Norberto Fontana was sent to the rear of the grid for passing under yellows in qualifying. He worked his way from 22nd up to 10th before he spun off.

● Jiro Takahashi

FORMULA NIPPON CHAMPIONSHIP, ROUND 10 OF 10, SUZUKA (J), 35 LAPS - 127.54 MILES, NOV 9

Pedro de la Rosa (Lola-Mugen T95/51), 1h02m07.83s, 123.17mph; 2 Takuya Kurosawa (Lola-Mugen T96/52), 1h02m20.92s; 3 Masahiko Kageyama (Lola-Mugen T95/50), 1h02m42.70s; 4 Masami Kageyama (Reynard-Mugen 97D), 1h02m49.09s; 5 Toranosuke Takagi (Reynard-Mugen 97D), 1h03m35.29s; 6 Tetsuya Tanaka (Lola-Mugen T95/50), 1h03m37.55s; 7 Koji Yamanishi (Reynard-Mugen 97D), 1h03m39.48s; 8 Marco Apicella (Reynard-Mugen 96D), 1h03m40.30s; 9 Toshio Suzuki (Reynard-Mugen 97D), 1h03m40.59s; 10 Michael Krumm (Lola-Mugen T96/52), 1h03m56.75s. **Final championship positions** 1 de la Rosa, 82pts; 2 Kurosawa, 28; 3 Norberto Fontana, 21; 4 Hidefumi Mitsusada, 20; 5 Masami Kageyama, 19; 6 Takagi, 18; etc.

Vatanen is king of the desert

Thiry wins epic Belgian battle

Ari Vatanen won the four-day UAE Desert Challenge, a 2000km event that rounded out the World Cup for Cross Country rallies, and gave Citroen the manufacturers' award.

The Finn controlled proceedings from the outset in the 120-entry four-day thrash across the Arabian deserts between Abu Dhabi and Dubai to beat team-mate Pierre Lartigue to the drivers' award, the Frenchman never recovering from the 10 minutes he lost in soft sand on the opening section.



Ari Vatanen jumps to the desert crown

While both Citroen ZX Rally Raids were in a class of their own, Mitsubishi looked set for third until former Desert Challenge winner Bruno Saby blew the Pajero's engine 30 miles from the finish.

Maurizio Colombo thus finished a distant third overall in the Nissan Technospot Patrol ahead of Finn Juha Liukkonen, while leading Arab desert campaigner Yaha Bilhili was fifth ahead of former Formula 1 racer Philippe Alliot. Britain's Robert Ives and David Parker ran eighth at the start of the final section in their Land Rover, but fell to 24th.

● Neil Perkins

FIA CROSS COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIP, ROUND 8 OF 8, UAE DESERT CHALLENGE, NOV 4/7 1 Ari Vatanen/Fred Gallagher (Citroen ZX), 12h33m10s; 2 Pierre Lartigue/Michel Perin (Citroen ZX), 12h38m11s; 3 Maurizio Colombo/Norbert Lutteri (Nissan Patrol), 15h30m35s; 4 Juha Liukkonen/Kalervo Matsinen (Land Rover Special), 15h53m48s; 5 Yaha Bilhili/Wael Marjan (Nissan Patrol), 16h08m43s; 6 Philippe Alliot/Jacky Dubois (Nissan Terrano), 16h26m42s; etc.

Ito wins with Coronel away

Daisuke Ito made the most of All-Japan Formula 3 Champion Tom Coronel being absent from Suzuka in preparation for the Macau Grand Prix by racing to his first ever F3 win.

Ito qualified on pole, as he had at the previous race at Fuji that was cancelled after Takashi Yokoyama's fatal accident. But this time he was able to benefit from it, leading all the way ahead of Yuji Tachikawa. Despite being close, there was no change of order, with the main move being when Shingo Tachi passed Miku Santavirta for third.

● Jiro Takahashi

JAPANESE FORMULA 3 CHAMPIONSHIP, ROUND 9 OF 9, SUZUKA (J), 17 LAPS - 61.95 MILES, NOV 9

1 Daisuke Ito (Dallara-Mugen F397), 34m37.40s, 107.35mph; 2 Yuji Tachikawa (Dallara-Mugen F397), 34m41.96s; 3 Shingo Tachi (Dallara-Mugen F397), 35m03.37s; 4 Miku Santavirta (Dallara-HKS F395), 35m04.05s; 5 Risto Virtanen (Dallara-Toyota F395), 35m05.39s; 6 Takeshi Tsuchiya (Dallara-HKS F397), 35m06.64s; etc. **Fastest lap** Ito, 2m01.17s, 108.27mph. **Final championship positions** 1 Tom Coronel, 60pts; 2 Tachikawa, 40; 3 Tsuchiya, 32; etc.



Ito goes wild with delight at his first win

Reports in Brief

The final German Veedol Cup long-distance race of the year – a six-hour race at the Nurburgring – was won by the Porsche 935 shared by Michael Irmgartz and Karl Maassen. But the title was won by Heinz-Josef Bernes and Dirk Adorf in their Group N Opel Astra.

Roberto Russo clinched the Philippe Charriol Supersport Trophy when he won both of the Lamborghini Diablo races at Zhuhai. He was pressed in the first race by Fabio Santaniello until he retired and let Ferdinand de Lesseps through into second place. However, de Lesseps had to cede to Emmanuel Clerico, who flew after taking over from Bernard Levy. Russo then won the second race from de Lesseps after early pressure from Clerico.

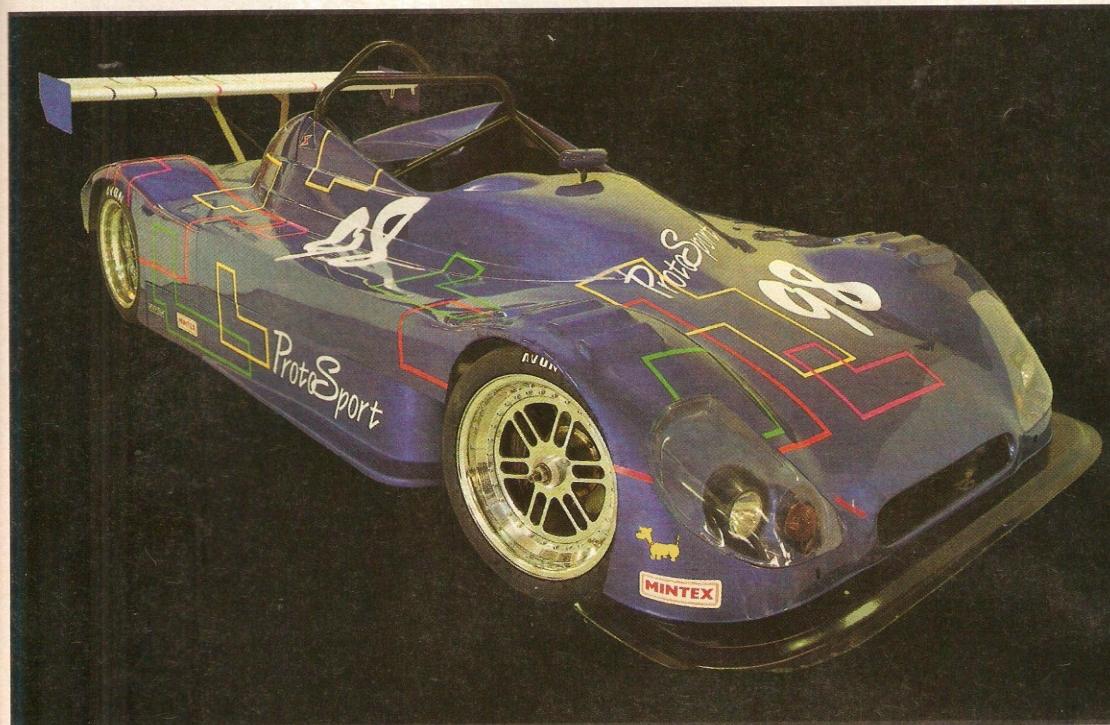
Henry Martin won both TC2000 races at Mendoza. He brought his Escort home ahead of team-mate Daniel Cingolani and VW's Walter Hernandez in the first race, then ahead of Omar Martinez's Honda and Hernandez in the second.

Dieter Depping headed home a quality field to win the Golden Tulip Rally, the final round of the German and Dutch championships. An electrical problem dropped his Escort WRC back behind Uwe Nittel, but he fought back and then Nittel rolled out on the final stage.

CLUB AUTOSPORT

ALL THE NATIONAL RACE, RALLY & HISTORIC NEWS PLUS FULL RESULTS ROUND-UP

EDITOR SIMON STRANG ASSISTANT EDITORS, DAMIEN SMITH, TIM SCOTT, KEITH OSWIN EDITOR-AT-LARGE MARCUS PYE



Powered by a 2-litre, 275bhp, Ford-based engine, the ProtoSport Evo3 should be among the most exciting drives in national racing

ProtoSport spec racer is go!

A new national Sports Racing Car championship intended to bring powerful Prototype racing within reach of the aspiring Le Mans driver is to be launched next season.

With interest in endurance competition booming, the Evo3 chassis costs £27,800 plus VAT, plus £5000 for the lease of an engine for the season, which undercuts 'rival' Supersports 200 cars. Four drivers have already bought cars, for which a finance package is available.

The identical cars, built to a high specification by a team led by Dave Beecroft, will be powered by 2-litre all-steel atmospheric engines

evolved from the Ford Cosworth YB series units by MASS. Sealed and performance-monitored, they will develop 275hp, only slightly less than the expensive high-revving engines in Historic Group 6 cars.

Spaceframe chassis are clad in aluminium honeycomb panelling. Inboard pushrod suspension features Intrax dampers. Staffs has supplied the gearboxes, and 16in wheels (9in and 11in wide) will carry control slick and wet tyres.

'Our aim is to make ProtoSport the fastest national championship, yet one in which privateers can compete for £15,000-£20,000 per

season, if they run the car themselves,' said ProtoSport marketing manager Bryan Horner.

'We want to put the fun back into sportscar racing. The class will be strongly policed to ensure fair play, and we will hold clinics to help the less experienced set up their cars.'

The 10-race Sports Prototype Racing Series, for which dates are being finalised, is expected to be staged mainly at one-day meetings, to keep costs down. The possibility of running alongside ProSport 3000 is to be explored with the BRSCC.

Full details of the Evo3 car from ProtoSport Ltd on 01925 818383.

Renault relaxes Star Cup age limit

Feedback from competitors who aspire to next year's Swan National Formula Renault Sport Star Cup has forced the promoter to raise the upper age limit in the division for year-old cars from 21 to 25.

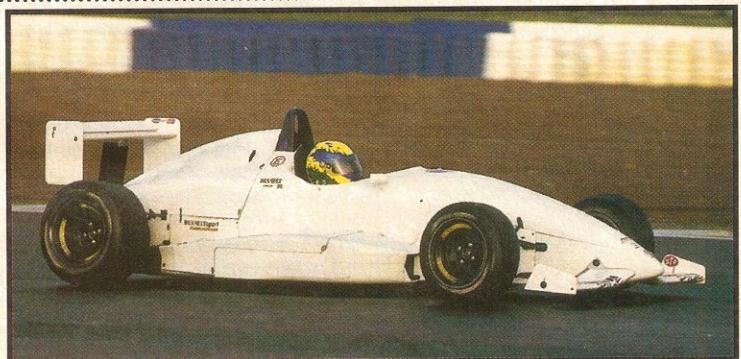
'We are in the business of getting people into racing, not excluding them,' said co-ordinator Simon North on Monday. 'While we still see the Star Cup being primarily for young drivers, we don't want to discourage late developers.'



Kerr: Fortec deal

The move opens the way for BARC Formula Renault series racers like runner-up Matt Bettley (22), Stuart Wood (24) and Alex Garner (22) to graduate. Champion Peter Clarke and third-placed Charles Hall both qualify as under 21s.

Confirmed Star Cup starters include Formula First champion Robbie Kerr (18) at Fortec, and Vauxhall Junior race winner Mark Boost at Paston Racing. Hungarian girl Judit Forro may yet join the fray.



Aluizio Coelho had his first experience of Formula Renault Sport when he tested Manor Motorsport's Tatuus RC97 at a wet Silverstone last Friday. Team boss John Booth was pleased with his 1998 signing: 'He looked very comfortable - he took to it straight away'

ProtoSport exclusive P109 Japanese wins JRRDS prize P110 Thundersports reborn P113

Karter Kiesa's a star in a car

Nicolas Kiesa caused a sensation at Silverstone on Saturday when he rocketed the third works Van Diemen from the back of the grid to finish sixth in the BRSCC Winter Formula Ford race, his first in a car.



'Quick Nic' Kiesa

The 19-year-old Dane's drive was the talk of the pit lane, but his speed was never in doubt after he lapped the National circuit just 0.3s shy of team mate Ricardo van der Ende in his second test.

Kiesa, runner-up in this year's World Kart Championship, missed qualifying because he did not have the requisite European sticker on his licence, but was permitted to start after Denmark's ASN rectified the problem. 'Nicolas made people sit up and take notice,' said Dennis Rushen, who engineered his RF97.

McLaren man to run Palmer Audi series

Jonathan Palmer has appointed Bill Harris as operations manager of the Formula Palmer Audi initiative, from a crop of 70 applicants.

Vastly experienced, Harris has spent six years at McLaren, the past three as co-ordinator of the F1 GTR race programme. Prior to that he ran Nelson Piquet's car at Benetton.

'Bill has the perfect blend of engineering and management skills,' said Palmer. 'He understands just what top quality really is.'

'Formula Palmer Audi's potential is obvious,' said Harris, who will prepare a new 20,000sq ft base situated just north of Bedford.

Humble Pye

Suddenly, it seems, sports prototypes are flavour of the month at national level

**MARCUS PYE**

Everywhere I turned over the past week, cars of the sports prototype genre (some more loosely related to the classics than others) seemed to be a major topic of conversation. As an ardent supporter of Group 6 since its heyday, it was fine by me.

First there was a visit to Warrington to see the new ProtoSport machine, then a chat about Global Lights at Snetterton with Bruce Robinson (whose Arch Motors concern is making more of the chassis), and finally Michael Vergers on the phone positively bubbling over a run in the new Radical chassis at Silverstone.

What with a Sports 2000 revival in Britain and the old Thundersports hung on the RJB Mining Sportscar series – both with endurance elements, I'm delighted to note – we fans are spoilt for choice.

But I'm wondering where the newcomers are going to fit on a national calendar, which already boasts Pro-Sport 3000 and Supersports 200, concerned in some cases that grids will be thin.

Certainly, ProtoSport and Pro-Sport (confused, commentators will be!) could, on paper at least, be happy bedmates. Perhaps the injection of the 275bhp newcomers would finally push the latter towards that elusive 20-car field promised by previous management regimes?

With pukka Group 6 cars costing between £40,000 for a competitive and proven Martin to the telephone numbers asked for certain models of higher-profile marques like Lola and Chevron, there is a demand for cheaper, modern prototypes among those not overly bothered by history.

If inexpensive (by motorsports standards) fun is all you aspire to, and you want a new car, Global Lights or the Radical class of the 750MC's Club Sports 2000 series may fit the bill. For 50 per cent more, a ProtoSport might take you to Spa!

Good luck to all of you I say, but once the bug has bitten – and take it from one fortunate to have driven quite a few of the greats, it will – be prepared for the chasm between costs of running a club car and entry into the International Sports Racing Series which might quickly become your dream. En route to reading your name on a Le Mans 24 Hours entry...

Japanese wins Jim Russell FVJ prize

Twenty-year-old Yuya Sakamoto will compete in the 1998 Formula Vauxhall Junior Championship in Britain as his prize for winning the prestigious Jim Russell Racing Drivers School World Scholarship at Donington Park on Sunday.

Sakamoto, who started racing on the Japanese course at Donington in the summer and won a Winter Series drive as the most promising graduate, is the second driver from his country to win the annual award. Takaya Tsubobayashi was victorious in 1994, and raced in '95.

'It was a good competition,' said JRRDS managing director John Kirkpatrick. 'Sakamoto was probably quickest in all of the disciplines, and was very smooth in the wet, which was encouraging. Given his lack of experience, he looked strong.' He will compete under the Jim Russell Racing banner, guided by Terry Gibbons.

Runner-up was 22-year-old Brazilian Rodrigo de Benedictis, voted most promising pupil on September's course. 'Rodrigo's a real seat-of-the-pants driver, very exciting to watch,' said Kirkpatrick. His prize is five test sessions with the Jim Russell team.

Third was 17-year-old Swede Thed Bjork, a graduate of the affiliated Scandinavian Formula

School, who won a Vauxhall Junior test. 'Thed showed presentation skills way beyond his years, and will definitely go a long way in the sport,' said Kirkpatrick.

They were joined in the final by Enzo Buscaglia of Milton Keynes, Japan's Yu Fukudagawa and Texan James Fischer after a three-day process whittled down the entry of 48 drivers from 12 nations.

Jim Russell, who started the school 40 years ago, chaired the judging panel which comprised Sven Frindelius of the SRS, former racer Jacques Couture of JRRDS California, last year's scholarship winner Aaron Povoledo of Canada and Geoff Prince of Arthur Prince, Loughborough. Ian Coomber of Vauxhall presented the prizes.

Two new awards were made during the ceremony. Buscaglia won the Wheatcroft Challenge, a three-race prize worth £4000, as the most promising graduate of the JRRDS Vectra Touring Car School. He has won 10 school races to date.

Andy Brown, an automotive design student at Loughborough University, won the Atlantic Challenge as winner of the school's Goldline Bearings FVJ Super Cup. The eight-time race winner will test a Formula Atlantic car in California early in the new year.



Formula Vauxhall 'as strong as ever'

Despite some top British Formula Vauxhall teams indicating their intention to follow EFDA's Formula Opel European-Union Series, which supports three Grands Prix, in 1998, organiser BARC is confident that its national championship will be 'as strong as ever'.

'While it is clear that one team is considering a full-blown assault in Europe, the others are more likely to retain their allegiance to Britain,' said competitions manager Dale Wells on Monday. 'On that basis we are pressing ahead with plans for more rounds and a team cup for entrants fielding at least two cars.'



Michael Vergers was so amazed by the Radical that he is still raving about its speed

Vergers loves Radical rocket

Dutchman Michael Vergers tested Radical Motorsport's second Kawasaki-engined sports racer at Silverstone on Friday, and staggered onlookers by outpacing serious allcomers in the wet – on slicks!

'I haven't driven anything as much fun for a long, long time,' raved the BTCC aspirant, who did over 80 laps of development work for builders Mick Hyde and Phil Abbott. 'I didn't want to come in.'

'I couldn't believe how fast it was – I was able to pass Pro-Sport 3000s, Formula Fords and Formula Vauxhalls on the National circuit, with a standard 1100cc engine.'

making 146bhp – and the sequential gearbox makes it more enjoyable.'

As a result of the test, Radical is developing a rear anti-roll bar for the car, which uses a transverse torsion bar at the front. 'The grip at the front was awesome,' said Vergers.

The car, the prototype of which turned a lot of heads on its debut at Brands in April, will be eligible for a class in the 750 MC's 1998 Club Sports 2000 series. Hot Hatch racer Steve Clark has bought the muleta.

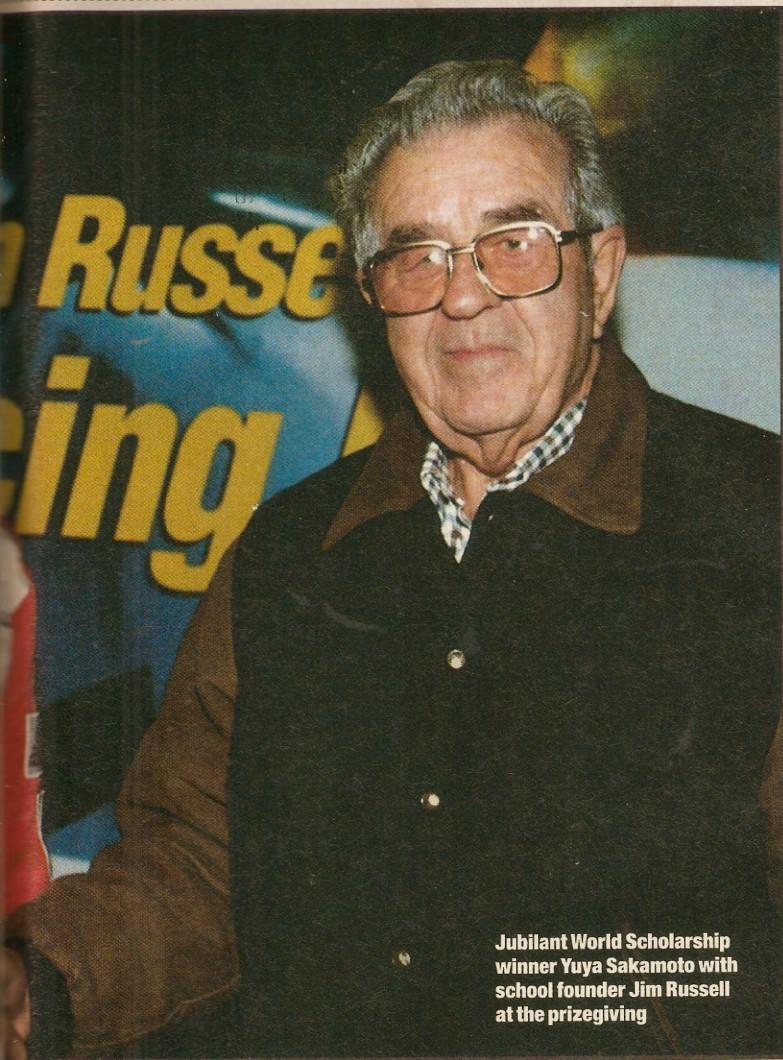
It is priced at £17,500 race ready, or £15,500 as a kit (both plus VAT). Details from Hyde on 0161 480 0212 or Abbott on 01733 344198.

Saggers stays on as Motaworld doubles

Motaworld Racing will run two Car Plan-backed Formula Vauxhalls in Britain and Europe next season, and has re-signed Stuart Saggers, who flew the flag alone this year.

'The whole EFDA package is a great one for our pan-European sponsors,' said team owner Alan Waite, who is negotiating with other drivers, 'but we have loyal backers for the British series too.'

Irish Formula Opel racers Ken Grandon and Mark Kershaw are also formulating plans to follow the EFDA European-Union series in their regular chassis.



Jubilant World Scholarship winner Yuya Sakamoto with school founder Jim Russell at the prizegiving

Kart stars line up for ADR run-off at Croft

The cream of Britain's kart racers have been selected to take part in ADR Motorsport's scholarship 'shoot-out' at Croft, announced last week.

European champion Jenson Button, fellow international Tom Sisley and rising stars Gary Catt, Philip Charles, Justin Edgar and Jay Howard will go head-to-head for the prize of a sponsored race in the Formula Ford Winterseries finale at Brands Hatch on November 23.

ADR is seeking funding to extend the deal to cover the 1998 season. 'We want someone whose future is not governed by his wallet,' said team boss Alan Muggleton.

Vallelunga finale to decide GpN title

One and a half points separate the top five drivers in the European Group N title race, which will be resolved at Vallelunga on Sunday.

Britons Bill Stilwell and Grant Elliott lead the way in their Honda Civic V-Tec, but William Savelberg (Opel Astra) and Ian Khan (BMW M3 Evolution) are a point behind and have much to gain in Italy.

Khan and regular partner Stephan van Dyck, who is another half point adrift, are in separate Schroder Motorsport cars to maximise the team's chances. Khan shares with fellow ex-F3 racer Adrian Willmott.



Jon Middleton proved the Forge with an impressive fourth place at Silverstone

Zeus to market Forge sportscar

Zeus Motorsport Engineering is entering the Supersports 200 arena in 1998 with a production version of the Forge Motor Sport car driven to a debut victory by Neil Riddiford at Silverstone last month.

Based on the Mallock Mk34 concept, and currently clothed in Mallock body panels (the definitive version will have Zeus's own six-piece body), the Forge prototype is built around an all-new CAD-designed chassis.

While it is aimed initially at the Clubmans Register's flagship Vauxhall-engined class, Zeus's Peter Sneller is keen to stress that the

Van der Endes on a roll into Snetterton

The brothers van der Ende, Jacky and Ricardo, go to Snetterton on Sunday leading their respective Formula Vauxhall and Formula Ford Winter championships, following wins at Silverstone on Saturday.

The Vauxhall competition concludes in Norfolk with a double-header so, despite having maximum points, Jacky must still fend off rivals Richard Tarling and Toru Nakano in both races to be sure of the title.

Ricardo leads Greg Caton by four points, but with double scores on offer at Brands Hatch's finale on November 23, the Formula Ford result cannot be settled until then.

Donington night fever for Eurocar

A high-octane Saturday night spectacular at Donington Park in July is sure to be a highlight of the 1998 Eurocar Championships, to be run over 12 action-packed rounds at seven circuits nationwide.

Run within a big two-day Ford Festival, the venue's first evening race programme for many years is expected to finish with a major rock concert and fireworks display.

'Our mission is to redefine the boundaries of entertainment within UK motorsport, and with sponsors attracted by growing audiences and superb TV coverage, our Donington debut fits the bill perfectly,' said Eurocar founder Sonny Howard.

News in Brief

The prototype Van Diemen RF98

Formula Ford 2000 is taking shape at Snetterton, and is due at US importer Primus Racing's Florida shop next week. Judging by the body bucks it will be a stunner.

Haywood Racing new boy Vitor Meira tested its ex-Martello Racing Van Diemen RF97 F Renault Sport for the first time at Silverstone last Thursday. American FF racer Paul Edwards and Australian returnee Stephen White shared the team's Ermolli.

Redgrave Racing is to test BARC F Renault champion Peter Clarke, runner-up Matt Bettley and FR1700 winner Matt Baldacci in its ex-Hoover Orsi Van Diemen RF97 at Snetterton this week. Renault UK has sponsored the prize drives.

Slick 50 Formula Ford First Division champion Owen Mildenhall tested one of Apex's Renault Spiders at Silverstone last week, with a view to a switch next season if he fails to land a top Premier Division seat.

Kiwi Gerard Rooney, who engineered Daniel Wheldon's Van Diemen with Andy Welch Racing this year, has set up his own team, G Sport Racing, in his homeland. He can be contacted on 00 64 3 348 8818.

Swift's strong presence in round two of the FFord Winter Series at Silverstone was topped by former works driver Justin Keen, who was drafted in to Fred Goddard's car and finished third. Tom Guinchard was seventh, but Oli Wilkinson and Zetec debutant Jonathan Price were eliminated in a startline shunt.

Two works Ray FF97s were out at Silverstone. Formula First graduate Andre D'Cruze was in the Zetec chassis, while Belgian-born Didier Stoessel drove his Kent version.

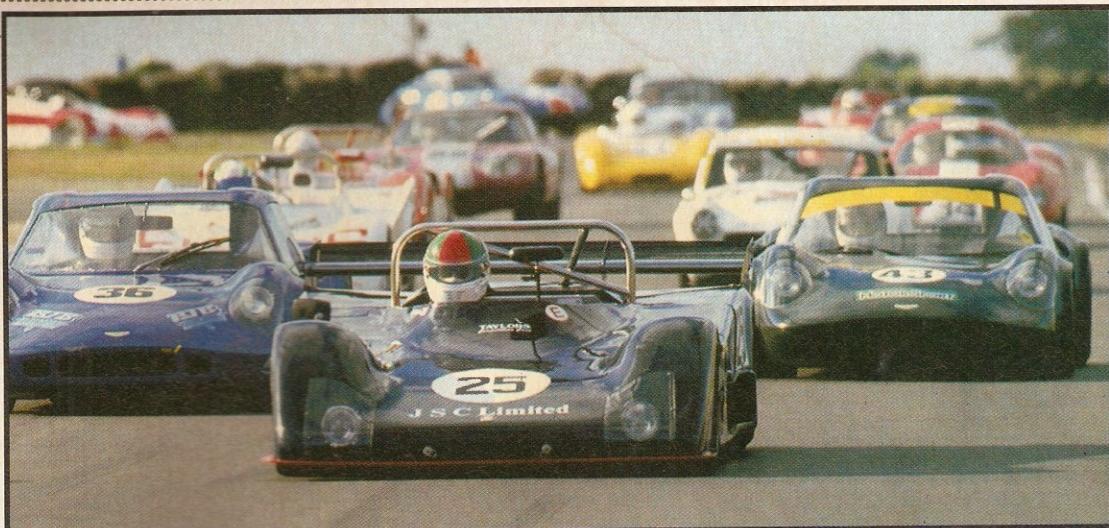
Karter James Derbyshire tested older brother Adam's FVAuxhall Junior at Silverstone last week, but will stay on small wheels in 1998.

Rover racers Colin Ward and Jeff Wyatt have teamed up to run an ex-Dutch Marcos Cup LM500 in next year's BRDC GT series. Ward is currently collecting the requisite licence upgrade signatures in an ex-Neil Hann Tomcat Turbo.

'Silverstone Syd'

Herbert (right) was named Driver of The Day at the circuit's season-closer on Saturday, thus was a popular recipient of the Winter Warmer Trophy. The event was the last official duty before well-earned retirement for the Jaguar fire tender driver and test day safety chief, respected equally for his skill at extricating drivers from twisted cars and stern bellow for everybody who ever erred.





Jon Shipman's Group 6 GRD leads a pair of Chevron GTs in the end-of-season RJB Mining endurance race at Snetterton

RJB revives 'Thundersports'

The Historic Sports Car Club's charismatic RJB Mining Sportscar Championship for pre-1980 cars is being relaunched for the 1998 season as RJB Thundersports, with a £5000 prize for the winner.

The continued support of arch-Chevron enthusiast Richard Budge, who has backed the HSCC series for several years - and fielded a B31/36 for former Grand Prix driver Mike Wilds since he hung up his own helmet - will subsidise entry fees by 50 per cent.

The adoption of Thundersports as a title evokes memories of the

Brands Hatch-promoted sportscar series which was so popular in the mid-1980s, and should heighten the seven-round series's profile.

Another move in a concerted bid to attract more front-running cars is the promotion of two mini-endurance rounds, aimed at double-driver teams. Several more Group 6 prototypes are due out, including Jon Shipman's GRD, Mike Simpson's rebuilt March 74S and hopefully a second Osella.

Classes will continue to be run for a wide range of earlier cars, including Chevron B6/B8 GTs,

Crossles and Lotus 23s, and former Formula 100 chassis of the type which won this year's title outright with David Hudson up.

Support for the budget Sports 2000 division is likely to grow, with the news of a welcome initiative by stalwart 750 Motor Club racers Brian Bergman-Field and Colin Feyerabend to revive the class in its own right with a short programme of enduros. Full details next week.

Information on the RJB Mining Championship is available from the HSCC's Silverstone headquarters on 01327 858400.



Adrian Horsley's rally-prepared Ford Sierra Cosworth was a surprise winner on Sunday

Runaway Horsley on top at Croft

Adrian Horsley, competing in his first rallycross since February, used his Ford Sierra Cosworth 4x4 rally car to win Sunday's second round of the Croft Championship.

Horsley's day was not trouble free, however, as his first qualifying heat was curtailed by a fire. The small conflagration was sparked by a wiring loom fault, but the damage was rectified in time for him to contest the third heat and make it through to the Final.

A clear win over Ken Hall's Escort Cosworth gave Horsley pole for the Superfinal. Tony Bardy lined up alongside him, having dominated

the Modified 1650cc class, and won its Final by a whopping 22 seconds.

The Dave and Goliath duel was denied, however, when Hall outdragged Bardy to the first corner. Rebuffing every challenge, he held out to the end as Horsley raced clear.

The Colway Tyres classes provided almost half the entry and, after a hard-fought 1600cc class victory, Peugeot 205 driver Dave Bellamy beat off the larger engined cars to win the Superfinal in only his second event.

Rallycross class winner Kevin Proctor also managed to set overall FTD with a 3m16.22s second heat run over the wet and slippery track.

Baldwin races on after bizarre illness

Veteran Mini racer Peter Baldwin was last week given the green light to compete in 1998 by his medical advisers, having been forced out of several events this season by breathing difficulties.

The Cambridge tuning wizard became ill, it transpires, due to a reaction between the carbonfibre material of a new dashboard and a lacquer finish inside his car which produced deadly cyanide fumes.

Exhaustive heart and lung tests have fortunately revealed no lasting damage, thus Peter is raring to be back challenging for victories in his 31st season of racing.

Taylor wins Ricard Caterham enduro

Stalwart British Caterham racer Nigel Taylor scored his first outright victory in the traditional long-distance race supporting the final French championship round at Paul Ricard on November 2.

Taylor's Hyperion-prepared car covered the 500km distance in a record time, and headed the sister car of team boss Magnus Laird and his brother Sam at the flag.

Hyperion preparation ace Jeremy Richardson - who raced a Daren at the circuit's inaugural meeting in the early 1970s - broke a quarter-century layoff to finish fourth.

News In Brief

Tomas Schechter, younger son of Jody, may take brother Toby's place in Team JLR's Formula Vauxhall Junior line-up next year. Gavin Hardy is back on board.

Caterham K champion Michael Caine was ecstatic after his first outing in the TVR Tuscan he will race next year at Silverstone on Friday. Promota Sport will continue to run Caine's programme.

Scottish car bodyshop proprietor

Davy Philp has bought Barry Lee's Eurocar V8 to supercede his V6 for next season. Lee will have a new chassis. The prospect of all 18 of the 460bhp brutes on the grid is a mouthwatering one for all!

Formula First racer Nick Padmore will follow family tradition by racing a saloon in 1998. Nick, whose father Keith raced Minis, has put a deposit on a Eurocar V6. Ex-Road Saloon star Andy Pyke has also bought one after a year's lay-off.

Surrey teenager Lee Caroline will join the Pickup Truck brigade next season, and has already taken delivery of his chassis from SHP.

Supersports 200 regular Bill Nickless debuted his ex-works Mallock Mk33 at Silverstone on Saturday. The Smurfit Corrugated-backed farmer is acclimatising to the rear-engined car by contesting Winter GT rounds.

Mini Se7en aces Dave Braggins and Dave Banwell made 'one-off' Miglia debuts at Silverstone. Braggins drove Richard Wager's Thames Car Radio car to an excellent third place.

Mike Bulmer returned to racing at Silverstone in a new Tracksport Mini, but a leg injury prevented him from doing the Floralsilk car justice. An ardent FF1600 racer in the 1970s, wholesale florist Bulmer last raced a Rover Turbo in 1996.

Briton James Dent and Germans Willi Beck, Gerd Holtkamp and Ralph Moog won a 750-mile race at the Nurburgring's season-closer in Beck's Sports 2000 Lola T492. Holtkamp won the German Open title with his Formula 3 Ralt RT1.

A resurgence of interest in Historic Formula Junior in Britain will see a series of races for the 1100cc cars and 500cc F3 machines run at Aston Martin OC meetings in 1998.

Congratulations to Porsche Cup champion Johnny Mowlem and his wife Fiona on the birth of son Reece on Sunday. On-track rivals Richard Finney, Jason Saunders and Mark Sumpter have also become proud parents in recent weeks.

Snetterton's season-closer on Sunday features the deciding rounds of the Formula Vauxhall Winter Series, rounds of the Formula Ford and First series, plus Minis and Special GTs. Action from 0900.



Ricardo van der Ende took the second chance of a restart to take a lead he would never lose, despite Greg Caton's effort.

Van der Ende Jnr sees off Caton

SILVERSTONE NOV 8

There was winter FFord glory for Ricardo van der Ende at Silverstone. By Tim Scott and Dud Candler

Ricardo van der Ende won the interrupted second round of the Winter Formula Ford series, but he was pushed all the way by Greg Caton.

The Dutch works Van Diemen driver secured pole position on the damp track, but it was very close - Alex Smith was just 0.05s behind in second, and the top nine were covered by only 0.69s. First round winner Craig Murray in the Mick Gardner Racing Van Diemen and Christijan Albers' Force example took the second row, with the Haywood Mygale pair of Derek Hayes and Greg Caton next up and Justin Keen's Swift in ninth.

A dry line had appeared by the first start, which saw Smith take the lead before Albers got through, but red flags came out after a big accident on the way to Copse that eliminated five cars. Robert Bell and Carl Breeze touched and Bell barrelled spectacularly down the straight as Breeze was knocked across into Oli Wilkinson's Swift.

Van der Ende got a far better start

second time and led into Copse, while Caton got off the line superbly to move up to third. He then took Smith for second and Murray followed through. Entering Maggotts for the second time, Murray lost ground and his nosecone when he hit Caton's car under braking.

The leading pair of van der Ende and Caton steadily eased away from the pack, but Ricardo could not shake off his pursuer. The gap was always under a second and on the last lap Caton, his car crabbing slightly following the clash with Murray, got alongside out of Becketts but to no avail, and van der Ende crossed the line to win by 0.26s.

'I knew that Greg was a threat, but really I was comfortable leading,' van der Ende said.

Behind the leaders the main pack had a fierce battle, the fivesome circulating together, with Smith initially holding off Albers from Keen and Murray, and a slow-starting Hayes joining at mid-distance. Albers passed Smith on lap four and Keen followed suit two laps later, and then the resurgent Keen forced his

way into third on the final lap. Smith and Murray had come to grief in a clash at Luffield the previous lap and only Smith made it to the flag.

Hayes was right with Albers at the flag, while sixth was an excellent result for debutant Nicolas Kiesa in the third works Van Diemen, the Dane having stormed through from the back of the grid after missing qualifying with a licence irregularity.

With polesitter Ian Smythe out on lap five, Belgian Didier Stoessel's Ray took the Kent class in style from Mark Taylor's Reynard FF92.

The Mini race saw Peter Baldwin

snatch a dramatic last corner win from Jonathan Lewis after a tense battle, with Miglia debutant Dave Braggins making it a three-way fight.

The fast starting pole man Lewis held a narrow lead until Baldwin found a way by on lap three. Braggins quickly set about Lewis, eventually getting second spot on lap eight, but Lewis fought back to retake second and the lead on the final lap.

Lewis was ahead on the dash to Luffield, where he caught some Mini Sevens. Baldwin dived inside Lewis and edged him out wide where he was momentarily trapped



David Kempton led easily in his ex-Laurence Bristow BMW M3 before the engine blew up

behind one of the Sevens, letting Baldwin through to win.

The Mini Sevens were equally dramatic, with Rob Selby holding off Paul Thompson at the head of a four-way scrap after Dick Hunter had lost his early lead.

Fiesta XR2 driver Andy Robey retook the lead of the Saloon race when David Kempton's ex-Colin Wells BMW M3 blew its engine while leading handsomely.

An oil spillage at Copse meant the Special GTs were red flagged on lap three. Chris Lord led all the way in the six lap re-start, despite a backmarker spinning in front of him at Brooklands on the final lap. Lord slowed to miss him, but finished clear of the battling Martin Harrison and Lance Robinson.

Formula First championship leader Oliver Smith took victory from Tom Herridge. A superb opening lap carried the second row starter Smith into the lead. Herridge got through on lap three only for Smith to retake the place a lap later and win by 1.8s.

The Silverstone Driving Centre races brought the season to a close, circuit champion Mark Fullalove taking the single-seaters after a late braking Julian Barratt spun away the lead. Jonathan Tee took an easier victory in the Saloon Cars.

BRSCC WINTER FORMULA FORD (8 LAPS) 1

Ricardo van der Ende (Van Diemen RF97), 8m14.11s, 95.88mph; 2 Greg Caton (Mygale SJ97), 8m14.37s; 3 Justin Keen (Swift SC97Z), 8 laps; 4 Christian Albers (Van Diemen RF97), 8; 5 Derek Hayes (Mygale SJ97), 8; 6 Nicolas Kiesa (Van Diemen RF97), 8; 7 Tom Guinchard (Swift SC97Z), 8; 8 Alex Smith (Van Diemen RF97), 8; 9 Jeremy Smith (Van Diemen RF96), 8; 10 Didier Stoessel (Ray FF97). **Kent Class 1** Stoessel, 9m06.87s, 86.63mph; 2 Mark Taylor (Reynard FF92), 9m11.98s; 3 Matthew Wood, (Swift SC95), 8 laps. **Fastest laps** van der Ende, 1m00.23s, 97.96mph; Taylor, 1m06.04s, 89.34mph. **Championship positions** 1 van der Ende 22, 2 Caton 18; 3 Albers 17. **BRSCC WINTER FORMULA VAUXHALL (12 LAPS) 1**

Jacky van der Ende, 11m46.56s, 100.46mph; 2 Richard Tarling, 11m49.09s; 3 Torhu Kakanoh, 11m50.70s, 12 laps; 4 Jay Wheals, 12; 5 Ken Grandon, 12; 6 William Langhorne, 12; 7 Juan Manuel Lopez, 12; 8 Toby Scheckter, 12; 9 GJ Mennen, 12; 10 Peter Boss, 12. **Class B 1** Steve Jewell, 12m13.99s, 96.70mph; 2 Steve Hay, 12m23.04s; no other finishers. **Fastest laps** van der Ende, 58.00mph, 101.73mph; Jewell 59.48s, 99.19mph.

BRSCC WINTER SALOONS (10 LAPS) 1

Andy Robey (1.7 Ford Fiesta XR2), 12m08.51s, 81.23mph; 2 David Pearson (1.8 Ford Fiesta XR2), 12m13.95s; 3 Gordon Streeter (1.5 Ford Anglia), 10 laps; 4 John Martinson (1.8 VW Scirocco GTI), 10. **Class winners** Robey; Streeter; Tim Dawson (2.0 VW Golf GT); Anthony Jones (1.8 VW Golf GTI); Roger Quantrell (3.2 Ford Capri); Steve Quenby (1.4 Vauxhall Nova). **Fastest lap** David Kempton (2.3 BMW M3), 1m10.23s, 84.01mph.

WINTER MINI CHALLENGE (10 LAPS) 1

Peter Baldwin, 11m53.96s, 82.89mph; 2 Jonathan Lewis, 11m54.32s; 3 Dave Braggins, 10 laps; 4 John Lee, 10.

Class winners Baldwin & Rob Selby. **Fastest laps** Lewis, 1m09.51s, 84.88mph **record**; Paul Thompson, 1m16.78s, 76.84mph.

BRSCC WINTER FORMULA FIRST (10 LAPS) 1

Oliver Smith, 11m35.06s, 85.14mph; 2 Tom Herridge, 11m36.83s; 3 Mark Higgins, 10 laps; 4 Warren Kent, 10. **Fastest lap** Smith, 1m08.13s, 86.60mph **record**.

WINTER SPECIAL GTs (6 LAPS) 1

Chris Lord (3.0 ProSport 3000), 6m16.18s, 94.57mph; 2 Martin Harrison (3.0 ProSport 3000), 6m18.97s; 3 Lance Robinson (3.0 ProSport 3000), 6 laps; 4 Jon Middleton (2.0 Forge M/S Mallock), 10. **Class winners** Lord, Middleton, Bill Richards (Metro-Cosworth). **Fastest lap** Robinson, 1m00.11s, 98.16mph **record**.

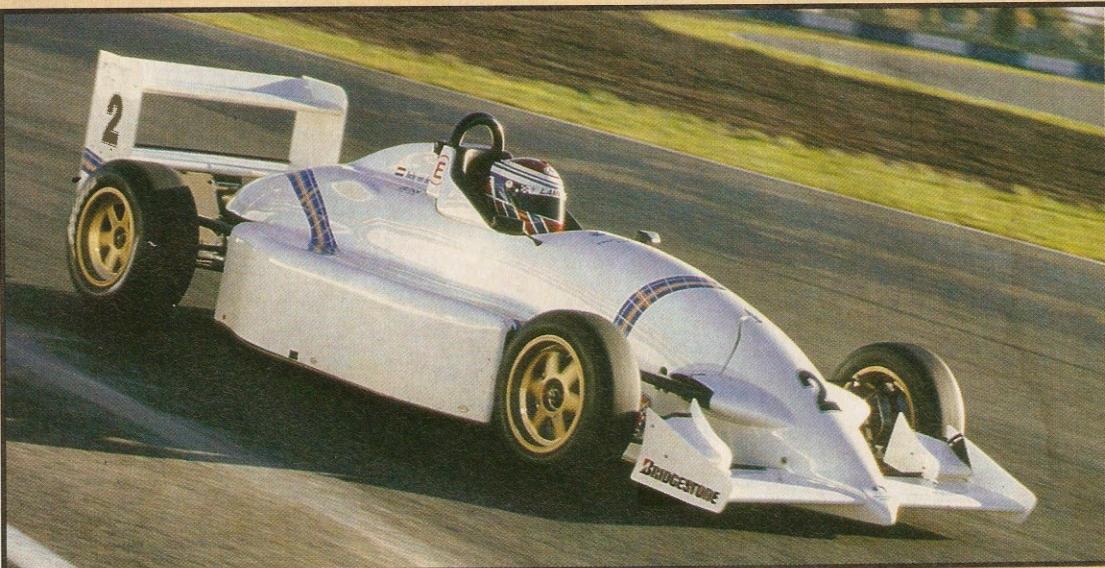
SILVERSTONE DRIVING CENTRE SCI SINGLE SEATERS (10 LAPS) 1

Mark Fullalove, 11m24.38s, 86.47mph; 2 Julian Barratt, 11m27.94s; 3 Ewan Merrett, 10 laps; 4 Jonathan Tee, 10. **Fastest lap** Barratt, 1m07.01s, 88.05mph.

SILVERSTONE DRIVING CENTRE PEUGEOT 306s (10 LAPS) 1

Jonathan Tee, 12m54.89s, 76.37mph; 2 Mark Burton, 12m59.39s; 3 Lindsay Rich, 10 laps; 4 Robert Moulding, 10. **Fastest lap** Tee, 1m16.19s, 77.44mph **record**.

Winter Formula Vauxhall



PSR mounted Jacky van der Ende took the honours in the opening Winter Formula Vauxhall race to go to Snetterton as series leader

Advantage van der Ende after winter victory

In an excellent weekend for the van der Ende family, Jacky van der Ende took the honours with a dominant display in the Winter Formula Vauxhall opener, making it a clean sweep with pole position and fastest lap.

But it was not all plain sailing in qualifying for the Dutchman – Van der Ende's clutch broke as he left the pits for the first time, and then his exhaust fell off. He bolted slicks on late in the wet session and only his last lap was the fastest. 'It could have been quicker,' Jacky said of his lap, 'but I couldn't risk going off, because it was my last chance.'

The damp track meant that wets were the tyre to have at the beginning of the session, but as time wore on, slicks became the marginally quicker option and times tumbled late on.

Sharing the front row with van der Ende was Richard Tarling in the Tecton car, his lap only 0.26s slower, and he was pleased having only had two days of testing in a winged car prior to raceday. Next up was Rowan Racing's Torhu Nakanoh, his time all the more impressive as he stayed on wet tyres. Only 0.07s behind was Argentinian Juan Manuel Lopez, running with Team Meritus PTM. He felt he could have been quicker. 'A slower car was in the way through Woodcote – it was my only flying lap on slicks and I lost half a second,' he said.

Sharing the third row with the Lynnspeed car of Jay Wheals was the second PSR car of Toby Scheckter, the South African disappointed after missing out on the slot to set a good time, having put on slicks. 'We were improving at second a lap,' he said, 'but we just ran out of laps.' Behind him was Irish visitor Ken Grandon in the Cliff Dempsey car.

The three American drivers with John Village Automotive had a

bad time – Peter Boss and William Langhorne opted to stay on wets and found their tyres destroyed at the crucial moment, while GJ Mennen suffered a sticking throttle after just two laps.

By the start the track had dried, giving van der Ende the advantage of experience in those conditions, and he made full use of it.

A good getaway put him in the lead and he set about building a cushion between himself and the pursuing Tarling and Nakanoh. 'I had a good start and I pushed really hard for the first two or three laps,' Jacky said. By lap four his lead was up to 2.5s, but after that Tarling stopped it growing any more. 'On the first five laps Jacky just got away from me as I found the limits in the dry, and that was it really - I was as quick but I couldn't catch him,' Tarling said.

As van der Ende counted the laps down and took the flag 2.53s ahead, Nakanoh had a couple of close looks at taking Tarling for second, but could not quite get on terms. 'Richard was quicker out of Luffield and I could never pass, but I'm happy with third,' he said.

Behind the leaders a train of cars circulated closely throughout. Eventually Jay Wheals, enjoying arguably his best FV performance to date, took fourth on lap four and gradually pulled away.

The man he relegated was Scheckter – having got a great start, an engine problem intervened and he dropped behind the pack to finish eighth. Grandon was fifth with Langhorne behind as the first JVA car. 'It's made up for qualifying, so that considered, I'm pleased,' he said.

Juan Manuel Lopez could only finish seventh, a broken fourth gear on the opening lap preventing any glimpse of his true potential.

Van der Ende goes to Snetterton this weekend in a strong position but there were mixed feelings for PSR team manager Andy Pycock. 'Jacky did a great job and we're pleased, but we're disappointed for Toby,' he said. Tarling's fine drive was the best ever result for Tecton, leaving team manager Terry Starkey 'over the moon'. Tarling can expect to be even closer to the flying Dutchman at Snetterton.

● Tim Scott



Jay Wheals and the Lynnspeed team graduated to Class A and netted a fine fourth

This is no idle boast, but the British motorsport ladder of success is generally recognised to be the best training ground for young drivers in the world. Brazilians, Argentinians, Frenchmen, Germans and Brits, along with many other nationalities, are represented throughout the myriad formulae of junior categories by young hopefuls desperate to prove to the British Formula 3, Formula 3000 and Formula 1 teams that they all have what it takes to be superstars.

But from the list of nationalities, you can virtually scrub Americans. This particular species is curiously few-and-far between on these shores, and it seems to have always been that way.

However, there is one driver shining through for good old 'Uncle Sam' and he is, according to his peers and those who know him, about to pave the way for a stream of American talent to flow onto the British scene.

Paul Edwards arrived in the Slick 50 Formula Ford Championship at the beginning of 1996 a relative unknown who had virtually no experience of racing cars, although with five national karting titles and graduation from the Elf Winfield racing school in France, he had enough credibility to join forces with the then newly-reformed Swift Racing Car Constructors. The season was a huge learning curve for both the team and its 19-year-old fledgling Californian star. However, towards the end of the year the results and the pace began to flow, culminating in a pole position at Knockhill.

This year duly started with a great deal of hope. Edwards stayed with the factory Swift team and initial testing proved promising, but when Edwards's work permit failed to materialise before the first round, again it seemed that he was destined for another year of bad luck.

That was until Brands Hatch. 'The best race of the year for me,' reckons Edwards. 'Jacky van der Ende led nearly all the way, but towards the end of the race, the Van Diemen's rear tyres were worn and as he came out of Clearways he got into a slide, so I got a run around the outside...'

It not only brought Edwards's first win, but a maiden triumph for Swift owners Gavin Wills and James Linton and things began to look good again. A second place at Oulton Park and two wins in the heats of the inaugural Slick 50 World Finals at Brands Hatch followed, before a competitive but ultimately fruitless final, where contact with another car kept him from the podium.

Despite the successes, Paul feels a degree of disappointment about his season. 'It didn't work out quite the way I planned it, but that wasn't just the fault of myself and Swift, it was circumstances,' he insists. 'The company has a business to run outside the race team and that takes up a lot of time, but we could have done things better.'

Edwards is a determined character, however - that much is clear by his decision to buck the trend set by many young American drivers of rising up through the junior US series, and racing in an ultra-competitive



Edwards scored three Formula Ford wins in the works Swift this season, all at Brands Hatch

"One of my main motivations for staying in Britain is that I want to be in F1 one day"

PAUL EDWARDS

ready to give up on that (Grand Prix) dream just yet.'

Under the guidance of David Sears Motorsport, which manages his career, Edwards is investigating the various 'slicks-and-wings' categories before a move up to British F3. 'I want to get into F3 as quickly as possible and then spend two years in that environment,' Edwards remarks. 'Once you've done that you can then truly begin to assess your potential.'

But where does that leave him for next year? 'Well the Formula Opel EU Series is beginning to look very strong, but there are also options in Formula Renault Sport,' he reveals. 'The great thing about Formula Opel is that all the top teams are so close, so a lot of it comes down to experience and ability.'

'Dan Partel, the boss of EFDA, which runs the FOEUS, really wants a good American driver in the series and he has been helping me a lot recently. Both Formula Opel and FRS are good, but it's just a matter of where I can find the support and which package will be the best.'

European environment. 'If a European driver made his way up the British ladder, then went and raced in the CART World Series for Indycars, I think they would definitely do a lot better than an American driver who rose through the ranks in the US. It's just so much more competitive over here.'

So if that is the case, and Europe is the best possible training ground, then why are there not more young Americans emigrating? 'I think drivers in the States have a pretty good time,' he says. 'All their friends are out there and it's a great atmosphere, but over here the money is harder to find, the weather is not so good and, more importantly, it's harder to win. There are drivers who are wealthy enough to come over to Europe, but they aren't dedicated enough.'

'One of my main motivations for staying in Britain is that I want to be in F1 one day. I know that if I wanted to I could go back and get a deal in USF2000 or Indy Lights, but I'm not

moves into slicks and wings formulae he will be very quick.'

Edwards tested a Haywood Racing Ermolli Formula Renault Sport car at Silverstone last week, and Rushen was pleased with his performance: 'The track was wet and the car new, but he didn't put a wheel wrong,' Rushen recalls. 'He was on the pace very quickly. He seems to like rain and that's something American drivers don't encounter as much as the Europeans.'

Rushen sees potential in Edwards's personality as well. 'He is a marketing dream. Everybody likes him because he is so laid back out of the car. He is a real Californian cool dude and doesn't strike you as a racing driver, until he gets in the car, then he's as aggressive



Edwards shone in a Formula Renault Sport test, and may graduate to the series in '98

Guiding light

Dennis Rushen, Senna's ex-mentor, now has Edwards under his wing

One of the many people Paul Edwards has impressed in his two years in Britain is renowned engineer Dennis Rushen, who has in his time run the likes of Ayrton Senna, Mauricio Gugelmin and Martin Donnelly. In fact, Rushen was so taken with the American that he decided to become his manager earlier this year.

'Swift was having some trouble motivating its drivers, so they asked me to come on board at Thruxton and help them out a little,' explains Rushen. 'It was obvious that Edwards had a lot of talent, but it was disguised by the problems with the car.'

'I wanted to help the guy out so I set up a meeting with David Sears, who also manages Jan Magnussen, Ricardo Zonta and Ralph Firman, and we put a deal together for me to manage him.'

What exactly is it though that Rushen believes is so special about Edwards? 'I don't see many weak areas in Edwards,' he says. 'He sometimes leaves the door open when he shouldn't, but he is only young and he has time on his side.'

'He is a very smooth driver and in some ways that has not helped in the rough and tumble of Formula Ford, but many people believe that once he

as the next man,' he says.

'When you look into his eyes, you don't see the anger that you do in some of these young hotshots, but then he goes out and does what he did in the Ermolli and amazes you. He is a bit of an enigma really.'



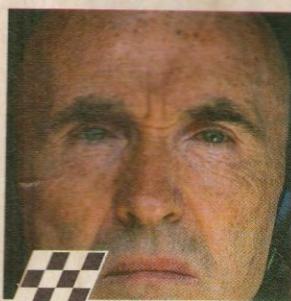
Rushen was amazed at Edwards's pace

Leading the US cavalry



American Paul Edwards is trying his luck in Britain and is widely tipped to go a long way. Simon Strang reports

Our most satisfying year



FRANK WILLIAMS
FORMULA 1 TEAM OWNER

The Race Bay is, both spiritually and geographically, the heart of the Williams factory. It is where our cars are built, and partly where our titles are won. There could be no better place to celebrate our most demanding, yet satisfying, season in Formula 1.

Our work-force gathered there, some 10 days after the final Grand Prix at Jerez. It was an intimate, low-key occasion, where champagne was sipped rather than sprayed in traditional F1 fashion. It was a chance for Patrick Head and myself to offer thanks for a record-breaking year that featured substantial mood swings.

A successful F1 team is rather like an iceberg. The public sees only the top two %, the work undertaken at each of the 17 Grands Prix. The planning and preparation which represents the vast majority of our effort might not have the superficial glamour of the race weekend, but it is of fundamental importance.

That said, I don't want to take away anything from the sheer professionalism of Jacques Villeneuve. He got the job done in a manner that should not be diluted by its controversial conclusion, involving the now notorious 'racing incident' with Michael Schumacher.

Rather than merely dealing with the collision, it is important to put it into the correct context, and dwell upon just what the drivers' title represents. It is nothing less than the ultimate testimony to Jacques's talent and temperament. He has proved he fears no-one. He has shown matchless self-belief, and a maturity that is the hallmark of any champion.

His win in the Austrian Grand Prix was, in my opinion, the pivotal moment of the season. Up until then, we at Rothmans Williams Renault had been one step behind Ferrari. That victory enabled us to establish our equilibrium. It changed the momentum of the entire season.

Of course, despite the fact we clinched our ninth Constructors' Championship at Suzuka, the Japanese GP was traumatic. It is fair to say Jacques was blown off course emotionally by his initial exclusion. It coloured his approach to a race he would probably have won.

We had only an hour to react to his exclusion, and we bought time by appealing. It was not a frivolous decision, because we felt there were several mitigating factors. Every driver on the circuit at that time ignored the yellow flag, and the stricken Tyrrell, which caused the problems, had perhaps only half an inch of its right front tyre on the track. A case could be made that

Schumacher had got off lightly in Austria, where he received only a 10-second stop-go penalty for a more serious offence: overtaking under a yellow flag in a race.

So that brings us to THAT incident, at Jerez. My first reaction was not instant outrage. It was one of concern and relief. Everyone realised Jacques was lucky to stay on the road, and the final 18 laps were an agony of expectation. When I saw Michael in the gravel trap, I thought, "Silly boy", but my gut feeling was he had acted instinctively rather than in any premeditated manner.

He had been penalised severely, because he was out of the race, but as the magnitude of the incident became clear I began to appreciate Jacques's anger. I know how hard he has worked for that title. But I also felt a strange sense of sadness. Part of me wanted the hullabaloo to die down, for the sake of F1's reputation. But I understood Michael's mistake had been made too publicly for it to be swept under the carpet.

Punishment seemed inevitable, given the global condemnation generated by his actions. But when a hero has his bottom smacked in full view of the world, everyone is belittled by the spectacle. The fact remains that if Michael Schumacher became available tomorrow every team manager in the pit lane would be in the queue for his services. That's the reality of his reputation.

As it is I'm looking forward to having number one on our car next year. Jacques is a worthy champion. In a way, Michael compromised his competitiveness by taking the additional money Ferrari was willing to offer him in 1996. He consciously put himself in the wrong place, the wrong car, at the right time. Jacques was in the right place, the right car, at the right time.

It says much for his strength of character that, despite the distractions, Jacques never wavered in Jerez. He was ready to fight. He is intelligent and strong-willed, and hardly a babe in the wood. Even when he arrived in F1 as the 1995 IndyCar Champion, he was armed with a good idea of what it would take to become World Champion.

The media had a bit of fun with his supposed

reluctance to take advice from Patrick, our technical director. They exaggerated occasional differences of opinion between two hard-headed individuals - but he has always been willing to learn. Ally that to a tenacious nature and you have a formidable competitor.

Retaining the title will be very difficult. Everything from the colour scheme of our cars, revised because of Winfield's association with us over the next two years, will change. In many ways, 1998 - with its narrow cars with treaded tyres - will be Year Zero for F1. It is a fresh start, an opportunity to excel on a level playing field.

Any sport is cyclical, and F1 is not as static as it may seem to the outsider. Our opposition will approach next season with renewed hope. McLaren's progress, one of the features of 1997, will surely accelerate; Ferrari will be a steamroller of unfulfilled ambition; Damon Hill will

bring the essential experience of winning races to Jordan; Prost, with its Bridgestone tyres, Peugeot engine package and partnership of Olivier Panis and Jarno Trulli, has the potential to be an outstanding influence. Benetton, too, should not be discounted.

We will not stand idly by. Even though we have ended our perfect relationship with Renault, whose engines provided us with unparalleled reliability, we have reinforced another important

relationship with their new successors at Mecachrome. Since the new rules will bring out the best in the best drivers, Jacques will mount a sterling defence of this title. Heinz-Harald Frentzen, best of the rest this season, improved significantly over the second half of 1997. He was initially erratic, but proved his value to the team, who appreciate his diligence and gentle nature.

I am fascinated by the evolutionary process of F1. That's what propelled me into the office the morning after our championship double at Jerez. The 1997 season gave us our hardest-fought set of titles and our most valued. Only 1980, and our first championship with Alan Jones, offered the same emotional charge.

Here's to the next time... ■

**"The title is the
ultimate testimony
to Jacques's talent
and temperament.
He fears no-one"**



Winners in '97: Frank (centre) with Jacques Villeneuve (left) and his manager Craig Pollock

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